

The City That Let Me Go

How a City Shapes You—and Releases You

NR.NITISH



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Stories Matter

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Author's Note

This book is a work of literary narrative shaped by memory, proximity, and emotional truth.

The story you are about to read follows Krish not as a symbol, not as a case study, but as a human being observed closely over a period of change. The events described are inspired by real incidents, but they are not presented as factual records. They are reconstructed through perception: how moments were felt, remembered, misunderstood, and carried forward.

This is not a book written from certainty. It was formed near the experiences it describes, before distance could soften them or hindsight could impose neat conclusions. Some chapters were shaped while the pain was still active. Others emerged during early recovery. None were written with the comfort of emotional finality.

Because of this, the story does not claim authority over truth. It does not attempt to judge intentions, assign blame, or offer definitive explanations. What it offers instead is an honest rendering of inner movement how love shifts, how attachment blurs boundaries, how silence accumulates meaning, and how leaving can become an act of survival.

Every character in this book is human.

Every mistake is imperfect.

Every silence matters.

This narrative exists because certain experiences resist being stored quietly. When they are left unexamined, they do not fade—they distort. Writing became a way to give those experiences shape, not resolution.

If this story feels heavy at times, it is because it was lived that way. And if parts of it feel unfinished, that is intentional. Growth does not arrive

all at once, and understanding rarely appears in clean sentences.

This is not a story about heroes or villains.

It is a story about learning slowly when love stops being care, when staying becomes harm, and when choosing oneself is not abandonment.

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Legal & Safety Disclaimer

This book is a work of literary fiction.

While the narrative draws upon emotional realism, all characters, events, conversations, and relationships are presented as fictionalized representations shaped by observation, memory, and interpretation. Names, identifying details, locations, timelines, and circumstances have been altered or obscured to protect privacy and to prevent identification. Any resemblance to real persons—living or dead—is coincidental and unintentional.

The story does not claim to present objective truth, factual accuracy, or definitive accounts of any individual's character, intentions, or actions. What is depicted reflects a limited perspective shaped by proximity and perception, rather than complete or authoritative knowledge of all parties involved.

This work is not intended to defame, accuse, diagnose, or pass judgment on any person, institution, or organization. It does not function as a legal record, psychological evaluation, or factual testimony. All interpretations remain within the boundaries of narrative observation and emotional exploration.

Certain scenes portray emotional distress, mental health struggles, and interpersonal conflict. These depictions exist for narrative honesty and thematic depth, not as endorsements of harmful behavior. Readers who find aspects of the story personally distressing are encouraged to seek appropriate professional support.

The narrative acknowledges that characters make mistakes, misjudge situations, and act from emotional limitation. These moments are presented without justification or condemnation, as part of a broader examination of attachment, vulnerability, and consequence.

This book exists as a fictional account of one individual's journey

toward self-awareness, separation, and emotional responsibility—
observed closely, rendered honestly, and left open to interpretation.

Dedication

This book is dedicated

To those who stay without demanding recognition.

To those who leave without cruelty.

To families who hold space when words fail.

To friendships that teach care, and to losses that teach clarity.

To the quiet versions of ourselves that endure

even when leaving would have been easier than staying.

To the nights that teach silence,

and the mornings that teach survival.

To cities that witness us breaking,

and let us go without asking for explanation.

And to anyone who has loved deeply,

lost themselves in the process,

and still found the courage to begin again.

You are not weak.

You are learning.

Reader Advisory

This book explores themes that may be emotionally intense for some readers.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Emotional dependency and attachment
- Anxiety and panic responses
- Mental health vulnerability
- The gradual breakdown of friendships
- Emotional influence, both conscious and unconscious
- Psychological distress and periods of hospitalisation

There is no graphic violence or explicit content in this narrative.

However, the emotional experiences depicted are presented with honesty and proximity, and may feel raw or immersive at times.

Readers are encouraged to engage with the text at their own pace and to pause if the material becomes overwhelming. Those sensitive to themes of emotional strain or mental health challenges may wish to proceed with care.

CHAPTER 1—Two Coffees

Delhi hadn't changed as much as he thought it would.

Or maybe it had—and he was the one who no longer knew how to notice it properly.

The street outside the café was alive in its usual way. Autos squeezed through impossible gaps. Horns sounded without anger, out of habit. A man argued with a vendor over change that barely mattered. Somewhere nearby, someone laughed too loudly—the kind of laughter meant only to fill silence.

The city was moving. Constant. Uninterested.

He stood across the road a moment longer than necessary, watching the glass front of the café reflect fragments of traffic and sky. He hadn't planned to come here. His feet had brought him without discussion.

He crossed.

The bell above the door rang softly as he stepped inside.

Nothing dramatic greeted him—and yet everything felt familiar enough to tighten his chest. The smell was the same: burnt coffee pretending

to be rich, sugar trying to soften it. The menu board had changed fonts. The paint on the walls looked fresher. But the tables were still placed precisely where they used to be.

Some places remember you even when you don't want them to.

He stood at the counter, scanning the menu without reading it.

"What would you like?" the barista asked.

He didn't hesitate.

"Two coffees."

The words left his mouth smoothly, without resistance, as if they had been rehearsed.

The barista didn't look surprised. Just nodded and punched in the order.

He moved toward the window seat—the same one he had sat in countless times before. He didn't choose it consciously. His body remembered before his mind did. The chair scraped softly against the floor as he sat down.

The chair opposite him remained empty.

He placed his phone on the table, screen facing up. Then he flipped it over. Then back again. There were no notifications. No missed calls. No names, he was waiting to see.

Still, he checked.

Outside, two college students crossed the road together, talking animatedly—one of them gesturing wildly, as if the story couldn't survive without movement. They didn't stop talking even after they

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reached the other side.

He looked away.

The first cup arrived and was placed gently in front of him.

Moments later, the second followed.

For a second, he just stared at it—the untouched cup, steam curling upward patiently, as if waiting for someone who was running late.

He wrapped both hands around his own cup and let the warmth sink into his fingers. It grounded him. He took a sip immediately and winced.

Too hot.

They used to complain here about how the coffee never gave you time to prepare. The memory surfaced briefly—not as a scene, not as a face—just as a feeling.

He pushed the second cup slightly away from the edge of the table, aligning it carefully so it wouldn't spill if someone bumped into it. The movement felt automatic. Protective.

Old habits don't announce themselves. They don't ask whether they're still welcome. They return, sure they belong.

The café filled slowly. Conversations layered over one another. Cutlery clinked. Someone dragged a chair too loudly. Life continued, unbothered by the small, quiet absence sitting at his table.

He drank slowly.

When his cup was nearly empty, he glanced again at the chair across

from him. It looked smaller than he remembered.

Or maybe emptiness always does, once it stays long enough.

He stood, slid the chair back in, and left the second cup untouched.

At the door, he paused briefly—not because he expected something to change, but because part of him still checked.

Nothing did.

Outside, Delhi swallowed him back into its noise.

For the first time, he understood something clearly:

The city hadn't lost anything over the years.

He had.

CHAPTER 2—Before Delhi Felt Like Home

When they arrived, Delhi felt temporary.

It was supposed to be a phase, transitional, something to move through rather than settle into. None of them said it out loud, but the belief sat quietly between them, unchallenged.

Krish arrived with little expectation. He didn't imagine anything specific for the city, no dreams attached, no fears either, just a place where days would pass until something else began.

Rishi and Aryan arrived the same week. They moved into their place together and immediately argued over trivial things, who got more light, where the bed should go, and whether the window should stay open. Their familiarity filled the space faster than furniture ever could. They had known each other long enough that silence wasn't awkward and arguments weren't serious.

Krish stayed separately.

It wasn't a dramatic decision, just a practical one. Close enough to meet easily, far enough to keep his own rhythm. He liked having his

own space, his own quiet. At the time, it felt sensible. Enough.

The early days were about learning the city.

They learned which routes saved time, which autos charged too much, and which buses never came when they were supposed to. They knew which shops stayed open late and which ones pretended to, closing just as you arrived. They knew how to walk long distances without noticing, because walking removed the pressure to decide.

Cafés became their checkpoints.

Not every place worked. Some were crossed off without discussion. Rishi would step inside, glance around, pause just long enough for Krish to notice, and say, "Let's walk a bit more." No reasons were offered. None were needed.

Over time, Krish learned to read that hesitation. Cleanliness mattered to Rishi. Smells mattered. Crowds mattered. If a place felt off, they moved on.

Eventually, they found places that felt right.

Nothing expensive. Nothing impressive. Just clean tables, enough space to sit without being rushed, and prices that didn't require calculation before ordering. Places where time slowed naturally, without permission.

They returned to those places often, without naming why.

Food became an excuse. Silence became routine.

Some evenings, they talked about classes, about people back home, about things distant enough to discuss safely. Other evenings, they didn't. Rishi would begin speaking, drift into something personal, then stop abruptly, as if the words had reached a boundary he wasn't ready

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to cross.

When that happened, Krish didn't fill the silence.

He sensed that people revealed more when they weren't pushed. That pause, when respected, eventually invited honesty. So he let the silence sit.

Rishi noticed.

Messages began arriving late in the evening. A short Where are you? A missed call without urgency. They'd meet, walk a little, find a familiar place, sit, and leave without trying to fix anything.

There were no promises made. No declarations of closeness.

That was how trust formed.

Through repetition.

Through showing up.

Through knowing when not to speak.

Slowly, Delhi stopped feeling like a stop.

Routine settled in, classes filling the day, evenings ending somewhere familiar, nights stretching longer than planned. The city didn't soften, but they learned how to move within it without resisting.

At that point, nothing felt fragile.

NR. Nitish

Friendship felt steady. Presence unquestioned. The idea that people could drift apart without warning hadn't crossed Krish's mind.

Delhi hadn't taught him that lesson.

CHAPTER 3 — Brothers, Not by Blood

Krish and Rishi had known each other long before Delhi entered their lives.

Their friendship began during intermediate days, ordinary at first, shaped more by proximity than intention. They weren't the kind of friends who announced closeness loudly. There were no dramatic declarations, no constant need to prove loyalty. They kept showing up for each other until showing up became automatic.

Delhi deepened that bond.

After moving to the city, instead of drifting apart the way distance often does to friendships, they grew closer. Familiarity turned into reliance, and reliance quietly became trust. Krish often came to campus without any real intention of attending classes. His days were not structured around lectures or attendance.

He came to meet Rishi.

Sometimes that was the entire plan.

Rishi stayed in a PG, and slowly, almost without discussion, Krish became part of it. At first, it was casual, a visit that stretched into an evening, an evening that stretched into a night. Then there were mornings and days.

Krish learned the rhythms of the place, when the warden made rounds, which stair made less noise, which corner of the hall stayed unnoticed. He learned how to move as though he belonged. Eventually, even the watchman stopped questioning his presence. To them, Krish became just another resident, one who came and went, but never really left.

Rishi never corrected them.

When the warden raised questions, Rishi argued. Not loudly. Not dramatically. But with a firmness that made it clear the conversation would not go the way the authority expected it to. He did not ask permission for Krish's presence. He treated it as a given.

Meals followed the same unspoken arrangement.

Krish ate there for days at a stretch. Plates were placed without comment. No one asked how long he planned to stay or when he would leave. The absence of questions felt like acceptance.

When Rishi fell sick, that acceptance became visible.

Krish stayed with him until he recovered completely. He returned to his own place only to freshen up, a shower, a change of clothes, then came back the same day. There was no counting of hours, no measuring of effort. It did not feel like care that needed acknowledgement.

It felt expected.

Or perhaps something simpler, default presence.

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They were there for each other through exams, exhaustion, frustration, and a homesickness neither of them spoke about directly. On days when nothing felt right, they sat together without trying to explain why.

They shared small obsessions.

Both had a noticeable sweet tooth. At some point, they discovered a place in Delhi's Bengali Market that served malpua with rabdi. The first visit felt accidental. The second felt intentional. The third became routine.

Soon, it wasn't enough.

Rishi found another place. That discovery turned into a search.

They began looking for better malpuas across the city, comparing crispness, sweetness, rabdi thickness, and aftertaste. They debated like critics, returning to favourites to confirm opinions. Sometimes Aryan joined them. Sometimes he didn't. The search itself mattered more than the dessert.

Months passed like this.

Rishi made other friends too. At first, Krish felt something unfamiliar, a quiet discomfort he did not immediately name. Not fear of replacement, just the unease that comes with change. Over time, he adjusted. He understood that closeness did not disappear when shared; it shifted.

Krish grew close to those friends as well.

Their conversations stretched easily. Business was a frequent topic. Ideas moved freely, startups, risk, strategy, ambition. They did not just imagine abstract futures. They spoke about working together, building something real, and failing together if it came to that.

Rishi reacted quickly to things. He was prone to frustration, quick to respond. Beneath it was care, direct and uncompromising. The kind of concern that surfaced without softness but without doubt.

If something felt disrespectful, he said it directly. No sugarcoating. No delay. Krish never mistook that honesty for cruelty.

They travelled together too.

Once, they went on a three-day trip to Himachal. It was there that Rishi introduced Krish to trekking. They climbed slowly, breath short, muscles protesting with each step. At night, they slept in tents, surrounded by a quiet that felt unfamiliar after Delhi. They visited cafés tucked into hillsides, places where time moved differently and conversations lingered.

Those days stayed with Krish.

This was not a friendship built on excitement or constant entertainment. It was built on routine. On showing up without being asked. On being present even when nothing needed to be said.

At the time, it felt stable.

That was the part no one questioned.

CHAPTER 4 — The Circle Grows

The group did not come together all at once.

It formed gradually, one person at a time, one late night at a time, until it reached a point where everyone felt included, even though no one could clearly remember when it had begun.

Evenings stretched into nights without planning. Someone would send a message, asking who was awake, and within minutes phones would light up. People gathered in rooms that were never meant to hold so many bodies.

Most nights ended the same way.

Everyone lay scattered across beds and floors, phones glowing in the dark, fingers moving quickly as they played games together. Free Fire matches ran past midnight. Shouting filled the room, blaming lag, celebrating wins, arguing over missed moves. More people joined online, voices overlapping, laughter louder than necessary.

Winning was secondary.

Being together mattered more.

Hunger followed naturally.

Late night biryani orders became routine. Orders were placed without checking the time. Sometimes the food arrived cold. Sometimes late. Sometimes incorrect. Complaints followed, exaggerated just enough to get refunds. Someone once joked about finding a hair in the food, and it became a repeated joke. Laughing about it felt harmless then, like bending rules that no one seemed to care much about.

Hostel gates were treated loosely.

At night, they crossed them when guards were distracted. When caught, they argued, sometimes loudly, sometimes persuasively. On a few occasions, it escalated into confrontations, raised voices, threats of calling wardens, promises that meant little by morning.

Once outside, adrenaline took over.

Late night bike rides filled the streets with rented bikes. Helmets were shared. Roads were mostly empty. They rode without direction, stopping wherever felt right. Sometimes they entered other colleges, attending events they had not been invited to. Someone always knew someone. Someone was always confident it would be fine.

Most of the time, it was.

Birthdays were celebrated at odd hours. Cakes were bought last minute. Candles were lit quietly so no one complained. Singing was half-hearted. Laughter was not. Sometimes they partied. Sometimes they sat together watching familiar movies, commenting on scenes they already knew.

Open book exams became shared experiences.

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Notes were scattered across beds. Laptops remained open. Answers were exchanged quietly. Someone worried about time. Someone dismissed it. They sat together, writing different names on papers built on the same understanding.

Throughout it all, Krish was always present.

He laughed when the moment called for it. He played when invited. He showed up when plans formed suddenly, without hesitation. He spoke less than the others, not enough to seem distant, but enough to be noticed.

Rishi noticed.

Aryan noticed.

One of them would ask, casually, whether he was okay, as if the question carried no weight.

Krish never had an answer ready. He would pause, shake his head slightly, not agreeing, not denying, only uncertain.

They did not press.

Late nights slipped into early mornings. Movies turned into conversations that led nowhere. Plans were made and abandoned without consequence. Disorder felt familiar. Comfortable.

From the outside, it might have appeared careless.

From the inside, it felt contained.

At that point, it never occurred to Krish that this noise, the games, the rides, the arguments, the food, the laughter, would not last.

It felt like the kind of chaos that would repeat itself.

CHAPTER 5— Chai

The language classes were held in a college that seemed to belong to everyone and no one at once.

Students arrived from different campuses, carrying different routines, different levels of certainty. The classrooms were shared spaces—temporary, functional, forgettable. People attended because they had to, not because they wanted to.

It was there that Krish met Priya.

For a few days, he noticed her only from a distance. Until one afternoon, she mentioned her hometown.

Their hometowns were close. Close enough that street names sounded familiar, that places didn't need explanation. It was a small detail, but it mattered. It removed effort from the conversation. They didn't speak much at first—just acknowledgements. A nod. A brief smile. Hi. Bye.

Weeks passed like that.

Priya was the opposite of him in every visible way. She spoke easily, laughed loudly, and moved through groups as if they were already hers. She knew people, introduced herself without hesitation, and participated in everything her college offered. She had opinions and didn't soften them. Independent. Confident. Emotional without

apology.

Krish watched more than he spoke.

She was the first girl he spoke to regularly outside his family. That fact alone made him careful. He didn't know how to continue a conversation without rehearsing it in his head first. She didn't seem to rehearse anything at all.

One afternoon, after class, Priya stood near the steps with a few others and asked casually,

“Do you guys drink chai?”

Someone shrugged. Someone said they were busy. A few agreed immediately.

Krish didn't know what to do. He took his phone out of his pocket and began scrolling—not reading anything in particular, just waiting for the moment to pass.

Priya noticed.

She walked over and asked him directly,

“Are you coming?”

He looked up, surprised. Hesitated for half a second. Then said,

“Okay.”

The irony was simple—he hated chai.

She discovered this immediately.

“Aree yaar,” she laughed, shaking her head.

“Bina chai aadmi kaise rehta hai?”

He didn't have an answer. He never did when she asked questions like that.

The chai place was small and crowded. The kind of place that stayed the same. She talked the entire walk—about class, about her college, about an event she was preparing for.

He listened, nodding occasionally, trying to keep up.

She bought biscuits without asking and handed them to him across the counter.

“Try like this,” she said.

“Otherwise you won't like it.”

That became a routine.

Twice a week. Sometimes more. Sometimes less. At first, people joined—five, six, in different combinations. Over time, most of them stopped coming. Schedules changed. Interest faded.

Eventually, it became five people consistently.

One of them was Spoorthy.

The chai continued anyway.

Priya spoke about everything. Her college events. Her frustrations. Her ambitions. She was bold in ways Krish wasn't. A leader without trying to sound like one. She spoke about feminism casually—not as a declaration, but as a way of being. She cared deeply, sometimes too deeply, and didn't hide it.

Krish listened.

Sometimes he spoke more than usual. Sometimes not at all. She never made it awkward. She filled the space easily—but not in a way that pushed him out. She included him without asking him to perform.

Months passed like this.

One evening, without hesitation, she said,

“There's a good restaurant that serves biryani in our campus. You should take us.”

Krish looked at his friend. They both said yes immediately, surprised by how easy the answer felt.

The conversations shifted slowly after that. Not dramatically. Just enough to be noticed. Less small talk. More comfort. Friendship that didn't need scheduling.

Around the same time, Krish moved into a flat with friends from his intermediate days. Life rearranged itself quietly—new rooms, new routes, the same faces.

The chai continued.

At the time, it didn't feel like the beginning of anything.

It felt like something that would simply keep happening.

CHAPTER 6 — Spoorthy

The biryanis continued.

They were no longer planned. Someone would mention it casually, and they would go. No discussion. No checking schedules. It became part of the rhythm that followed Priya—easy decisions, shared hunger, familiarity that didn't need asking.

One evening, while plates were pushed aside, Priya said, almost as an afterthought,

“You should meet my flatmate. She's also in our language class.”

That was how Spoorthy entered the circle.

Krish had noticed her before, but only briefly. In passing. In corners of classrooms. She never stayed long enough to draw attention. She seemed selective about where she placed herself, speaking mostly to people she already knew. With others, she observed more than she spoke.

She appeared to have connections—student organisations, people who carried quiet influence. She wasn't conventionally striking, but there

was something about her presence that lingered. Perhaps confidence. Or the way she spoke—measured, firm—making people listen without needing volume.

At times, she could seem aggressive. At other moments, almost childish. She didn't overreact. She formed opinions quickly, but not carelessly. There was intention in her silences. She was often unwell, and when she wasn't, she danced—disciplined, precise. She spoke about her family openly, without embarrassment.

These were impressions Krish formed gradually, without effort.

Occasionally, their thoughts aligned. Not often enough to feel deliberate, but enough to register.

There was a university event one day. Public. Crowded. Filled with noise and movement. Priya and her friends attended. Krish came with his group. Spoorthy wasn't there—she was unwell again, someone mentioned casually.

After the event, Priya turned to Krish and asked,

“Do you want to come to our flat?”

He paused.

It was his first time visiting a girls' flat. The hesitation surfaced quickly, instinctively. He agreed—not with confidence, but without resistance.

They walked together. The flat was quiet when they arrived. Clean in a way that surprised him. Organised. Things placed deliberately rather than carelessly. It felt different from the spaces he was used to—less chaotic, more considered.

Spoorthy was there.

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She looked up briefly when they entered. Nodded. Greeted them. Nothing more. A few minutes later, she went into her room and closed the door.

Krish remained where he was, unsure of how to position himself. He spoke little. Possibly less than expected.

Someone asked,

“Are you okay?”

“Yes,” he replied.

It was the answer he used most often.

He couldn't recall exactly when the conversation shifted.

At some point, Spoorthy returned. A comment was made. A response followed. Conversation formed quietly, without anyone noticing its beginning. Before long, they were speaking more than he had that evening.

More than he usually spoke with Priya.

That realisation arrived later.

They spoke first about ordinary things. Then slightly larger ones. Not personal. Not revealing. Just aligned. The ease of it surprised him.

After that day, their conversations increased. Not noticeably. Just enough to alter the balance. Enough that he sometimes found himself waiting for her reply.

One small detail altered the group's routine.

Both of them disliked chai.

It surfaced casually, almost as a complaint. Because of it, the group began choosing places that offered both chai and coffee. A minor adjustment. No one remarked on it.

Krish noticed.

At the time, it felt insignificant. Preference. Convenience.

He didn't yet understand how easily small accommodations could become emotional ones.

For now, it felt simple.

It felt manageable.

CHAPTER 7— Between Two Silences

The semester ended in November.

With it, something else began to fracture—quietly, without announcement. Tension surfaced between Priya and Spoorthy. Trust seemed to weaken. Misunderstandings accumulated. What felt like jealousy arrived slowly, often disguised as concern.

At that time, Krish was still getting to know them. He didn't read the situation as serious. To him, it felt like an evolving friendship—new people, new bonds, nothing that required attention.

But gradually, he began noticing patterns that unsettled him.

When he spoke more to one of them, the other appeared distant.

When Priya invited him for coffee, Spoorthy often suggested something similar.

When Spoorthy made plans, Priya would appear with her own reason to meet.

It repeated often enough that it stopped feeling accidental.

Krish didn't know how to respond. He didn't want to choose. He didn't want to explain. He told himself it was harmless—overlapping friendships, coincidence, timing. Still, the tension felt real, pulling him in opposite directions.

As the space between Priya and Spoorthy widened, Krish found himself spending more time with Spoorthy. Not intentionally. It unfolded on its own. Conversations extended. Study sessions continued late into the night.

The final class of the semester arrived.

Trying to change routine, Krish suggested they go to BBQ Nation. The response surprised him—laughter, disbelief.

“Is this really Krish asking us?” someone joked.

They asked him to suggest something else.

Without thinking, he said,

“Why don't you all come to my flat for lunch?”

He expected hesitation.

Instead, everyone agreed.

That night, the flat changed. Krish and his roommates cleaned thoroughly. Their usual disorder disappeared. His roommates cooked properly. Food filled the space. Laughter followed. They ate, danced, played games.

The day passed quickly.

In the evening, as they walked toward the metro, Krish hoped to spend a few moments with Spoorthy. She was engaged in animated conversation with his friends.

Priya walked slightly apart.

Krish noticed.

He stepped beside her and asked softly,

“Are you okay?”

“I’m okay,” she replied.

But her expression suggested otherwise.

He noticed the strained smile, the restraint in her eyes. It seemed as if the gathering had overwhelmed her—not intentionally, but enough to leave her unsettled. She wasn’t close enough to him yet to articulate what she felt.

They separated, after five minutes Spoorthy called Krish and asked him to come back to metro station for a group photo together. Krish with his flatmates came back to metro station and took a group photo together.

Exams followed.

Priya withdrew completely. No messages. No chai. No biryani. Later, Krish learned she had left the flat and shifted to a hostel.

During that time, he grew closer to Spoorthy.

They studied overnight. Slept through mornings. Spent days waking only to eat. Sometimes he returned to his place early just to sleep.

When he casually mentioned to Rishi and Aryan that he was staying in a girls 'flat, they reacted with disbelief.

“You? In a girls 'flat?”

“Is that even true?”

He didn't explain. He didn't know how.

Exams began.

Spoorthy asked if he was going home.

“Yes.”

“Can you book my ticket too?” she asked.

He did.

All tickets were waitlisted.

Later that day, Priya called.

“Can you book me a Tatkal ticket?” she asked, naming the train.

It was the same one.

Krish agreed—without mentioning that Spoorthy and her friend were travelling as well. He didn't know how to bring it up.

At the station, he arrived early. Spoorthy hadn't yet left her room.

Then he saw Priya.

Her exhaustion was visible—swollen eyes, a tiredness that didn't hide. She looked like someone who had cried alone for too long.

Still, he didn't mention that others were travelling.

At the last moment, Spoorthy and her friend ran and boarded the moving train.

That was when the atmosphere shifted.

Priya called again.

"I forgot my charger."

"I'll come to you," Krish said.

"No," she replied quickly. "I'm coming."

She arrived and noticed Spoorthy and her friend.

"Oh," she said quietly. "You're also here."

She asked Krish to come toward the door.

From her seat, Spoorthy laughed lightly.

"Go, go. Your best friend is calling."

Near the door, Priya spoke softly.

"Don't worry. I won't ask about them. I understand."

Relief came before guilt.

They sat near the door and spoke for a long time—about family, childhood, things Krish rarely shared. For the first time, he sensed that Priya trusted him. That trust felt heavier than comfort, because he wasn't sure he deserved it.

Later, Spoorthy asked,

“What did Priya say?”

“Nothing personal,” Krish replied.

Spoorthy nodded. She didn't press. She accepted answers selectively.

Spoorthy and her friend disembarked at their stop.

Now Priya had time. She spent it entirely with him. They spoke continuously until the journey ended.

Ten days completed in the blink of an eye.

Krish waited for Spoorthy's message.

It arrived.

“Have you booked your return ticket?”

“Planning,” he replied.

“Let's go together,” she said.

He had planned to fly. Without reflection, he changed it.

The return journey with Spoorthy became one of his most memorable. They spoke endlessly—about everything, about nothing. He felt noticed. Not completely, but enough to feel hopeful.

Those journeys stayed with him.

Over the next six months, Krish developed feelings on Spoorthy.

He didn't rush. He waited—perhaps too long. Late-night calls

stretched until morning. Days blurred into months. Somewhere in those conversations, he began believing patience itself could stand in for certainty.

One day, Spoorthy and her friend staged a prank.

A fake proposal.

Krish believed it.

He confessed his feelings.

She laughed.

“It was a prank. But you do have feelings for me.”

Then she said,

“I don't love you.”

She suggested they remain friends.

Krish said it wouldn't work.

It was his first rejection.

It didn't break him immediately. What lingered instead was confusion. He wasn't sure whether the pain came from the rejection itself or from how easily it occurred.

A week later, she called.

“Why can't we stay friends?” she asked.

During that week, Spoorthy appeared unsettled. She tried staying busy, filling her time with people and movement. When that failed, she tried solitude—scrolling aimlessly, sitting with distraction. Nothing held. The absence remained specific, resistant to replacement.

That was why she called.

Krish paused.

He understood, even then, that agreeing would cost him something. He didn't know how much.

He had never been good at refusing.

He said,

“Okay.”

And in that word, without fully realizing it, he stepped into a place he would later struggle to leave.

CHAPTER 8 — What They Called Friendship

After they agreed to remain friends, nothing ended.

That was the problem.

They returned to what resembled how things had been before—late-night conversations that stretched for hours, messages arriving without warning, calls that continued until sleep interrupted them. From the outside, it looked familiar. Almost normal.

But something underneath had shifted.

Spoorthy appeared to watch him closely. Not openly. Not with concern. With attention. She seemed to notice when his replies came too quickly, when his voice changed, when silence unsettled him. Whether she fully understood what was happening or simply sensed it, Krish couldn't tell.

What felt clear to him was this: once someone falls in love, friendship becomes fragile. Something has to give—distance or pain.

Neither of them chose distance.

They repeated the same patterns, aware there would be consequences,

unwilling to face them directly.

Krish no longer felt uncertain.

He felt invested—fully.

He sensed how much space she occupied in his life: his time, his focus, his nights. He didn't resist it. He didn't resent it. He only knew that he didn't want her to disappear from his life. And from what he could tell, she didn't want him gone either.

He tried, briefly, to change how he felt. He told himself emotions could soften if ignored long enough. That time would dull everything.

It didn't.

With each passing day, what he felt seemed to deepen. Settle heavier.

When she didn't call, he waited.

Sometimes for hours.

Sometimes through the night.

He held onto a quiet belief—that whenever he reached a low point, someone would arrive to pull him out.

Often, that person was Rishi.

The call would come suddenly.

“Get ready,” Rishi would say. “We're going for a ride.”

Late-night bike rides became their escape—empty roads, cool air, no destination that mattered. On those rides, honesty returned—the kind that didn't demand resolution.

Krish was never good at holding things in.

Eventually, he told Rishi everything—every conversation, every contradiction, every stretch of waiting.

Rishi listened.

Then he said what Krish had already considered.

“Stop talking to her.”

The advice was direct. Necessary. Reasonable.

But Spoorthy's words always arrived later—softer, carefully placed. Enough to replace certainty with hesitation. Enough to delay what Krish knew he should do.

He didn't stop.

During this time, he stayed in touch with Priya. They met occasionally. Brief conversations. A familiar presence. He never cut her off.

But he never spoke about Spoorthy either.

Some things felt too tangled to explain.

Krish began moving through his days reacting rather than choosing—waiting instead of acting.

Priya noticed.

She checked in more often. Calls. Messages. Questions that seemed simple but carried concern. Krish replied less. Shorter responses. Pauses where conversation used to be.

One day, Spoorthy asked him directly again.

“Do you still have feelings for me?”

He paused.

“I don't know,” he said. “I'm confused.”

For the first time, Spoorthy didn't deflect. She didn't joke. She didn't soften it.

She seemed to understand.

Gradually—without announcement—she created distance. Fewer calls. Shorter conversations. Space where consistency had once existed.

Krish felt the change immediately.

By then, it was no longer possible to pretend that nothing had shifted.

CHAPTER 9 — The Quiet Place Between

Krish was still close to Spoorthy—but not in the way he had been before.

The conversations were shorter now. Less frequent. The pauses between replies had grown long enough to notice. He sensed what was happening, even if he couldn't explain it—to her or to himself. It felt like standing in a room where the lights were slowly dimming, without anyone touching the switch.

He carried that feeling everywhere.

Priya noticed.

She began calling him regularly—not to ask questions or demand explanations, but to check in. Her voice stayed light, casual, as if she didn't want to disturb whatever fragile balance he was trying to hold together.

One evening, she asked him to meet her at Ama Café.

It was popular. Crowded. Familiar to many. New to him.

They sat across from each other, coffee cooling between them. Priya studied him quietly, the way someone does when they are listening more than speaking.

“What's happening with you?” she asked softly.

“What happened?” he replied. “I'm totally fine.”

She didn't argue.

They took a few selfies—nothing posed, nothing intentional. When she said she would post one on her Instagram story, he stopped her without thinking.

“Please don't.”

She looked at him, surprised. “Why?”

“Let this be personal,” he said.

She nodded immediately. “Okay.”

He didn't say that he didn't want Spoorthy to see it. He wasn't sure he could explain that clearly. Priya didn't press for reasons.

On the way back, they shared a rickshaw to the metro station. The city passed them in fragments—lights, voices, traffic. Somewhere between one turn and the next, Priya reached for his hand.

“Don't worry,” she said quietly. “I don't know what you're going through. But everything will be fine, as long as you stay strong.”

The warmth of her hand surprised him.

Not because it was inappropriate—but because it felt steady, Grounding. He hadn't realised how tense he was until his body responded on its own.

A thought crossed his mind unexpectedly:

This is a person I shouldn't lose.

Priya was western-oriented in the way she lived—comfortable with affection, natural with closeness. She hugged her friends when they met and when they left. When they stepped out of the rickshaw, she moved to hug him too.

Krish stopped her gently.

He shook her hand instead.

“Thank you for meeting me today,” he said. “It really means a lot.”

She smiled—briefly puzzled, then amused—and let it go.

Later that night, he texted her to explain why he hadn't hugged her. She laughed at the message and teased him for being old-school.

That meeting didn't remain a one-time thing.

It became routine.

Priya started coming to his place for an hour or two, for lunch or dinner, then leaving—no extended plans. No expectations. Sometimes he went to campus to meet her. Sometimes they walked together without speaking. They sat side by side in silences that didn't feel awkward or empty.

He didn't speak to her about Spoorthy.

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But Priya spoke to him about everything else—her health issues, problems at home, worries she didn't share easily. She cried in front of him sometimes, openly, without embarrassment. He understood what that suggested.

She trusted him.

She mentioned him to her parents casually, as if his presence in her life didn't require explanation.

Slowly—without either of them naming it—they became a constant.

Days felt incomplete without talking. Conversations didn't need direction. Silence didn't need filling. Their bond deepened quietly, not through intensity, but through repetition.

All this time, Krish was still connected to Spoorthy—less often now, but not gone. Present enough to confuse him.

Rishi remained the same—quiet, distant from girls, grounded. One day, Krish introduced him to Priya. Watching them speak felt unfamiliar and reassuring at the same time, like two essential parts of his life acknowledging each other.

He didn't recognise it then.

But something fundamental had already shifted.

Not away from Spoorthy.

Toward something else.

CHAPTER 10 — The Spaces Between

The call came unexpectedly.

“Let's go to Agra,” Priya said, as if she were suggesting coffee after class.

Krish didn't respond immediately. The idea unsettled him—not the destination, but the invitation itself. A trip. Just the two of them. The thought carried more weight than he was prepared for.

“Is... is anyone else coming?” he asked, careful not to sound surprised.

“No,” she replied easily. “Just us. But if you want to bring someone, I don't have a problem.”

The call ended. Krish remained seated, his phone still in his hand.

A minute later, it rang again.

“Why don't you ask Rishi?” Priya added quickly. “I was thinking about it.”

Krish exhaled. “Yeah. I was thinking the same.”

When he called Rishi, the reaction came immediately.

“Bro,” Rishi laughed, “I met her recently, and now you're asking me for a trip?”

“It wasn't only my idea,” Krish said. “She suggested I ask you.”

There was a pause.

“Okay,” Rishi said. “Let's go.”

They checked train tickets first. Waiting lists everywhere. Rishi frowned at the screen.

“You know I don't like trains,” he said. “Why don't we rent a self-drive car?”

The decision followed easily.

That night, Krish called Priya again.

“Be ready tomorrow morning. Five a.m. We'll pick you up.”

“Pick me up?” she asked, confused. “What do you mean, pick up?”

He smiled. “It's early. We'll go together from your hostel.”

She hesitated, then said, “Okay...” still unsure what she had agreed to.

The next morning, Krish and Rishi reached her hostel. When the car stopped outside, Priya assumed it was a cab—until she saw Rishi in the driver's seat.

She froze, then laughed.

“Ohhh. Now I understand what you meant by picking me up.”

The City That Let Me Go

“Don't worry,” Rishi said casually. “We'll drop you back safely.”

As the car moved forward, the atmosphere shifted.

Rishi and Priya talked easily—about festivals, food, stray memories that surfaced without effort. Krish watched from the back seat, amused, and unexpectedly at ease.

Before picking her up, Rishi had asked him quietly, “We'll enjoy this trip, right?”

Krish had smiled. “Just wait.”

They moved through Mathura, Vrindavan, and Agra. The streets were crowded—some festival was underway—and Rishi stayed alert, instinctively attentive whenever Priya stepped ahead in the crowd.

At one point, they lost the car.

They had parked it somewhere. Forgot where.

Instead of panicking, they laughed. Walked for hours. Got tired. Eventually found it. By then, time felt irrelevant.

They reached Delhi the next day—late, exhausted, lighter than they had been in weeks.

Something settled between them.

Not named.

Not discussed.

Just present.

Krish stayed cautious. No photos. No stories. No updates. He didn't

want Spoorthy to see. Rishi understood without explanation. Priya noticed, though she didn't ask why.

Months later, Spoorthy would come to know anyway.

By then, nothing changed because of it.

They began meeting almost every day—sometimes five days a week. Exploring food places around the university. Chai became unavoidable. Even Rishi, who once disliked it, adjusted slowly because of Priya.

Occasionally, Rohan joined them. Priya was easing into the group—not fully part of it yet, but no longer on the outside.

Krish stayed alert. Some cafés were close to Spoorthy's area. He remained cautious about running into her.

It didn't happen.

One evening, Krish couldn't join them. Rishi and Priya met without him. That was when Rishi introduced her properly to his flatmates—Rohan, Aryan, and Jatin. She already knew some of them, but the rest responded easily to her presence.

She filled the room without effort.

Meanwhile, Krish continued meeting Spoorthy occasionally. Temples. Cafés. Her flat. Enough to keep things unsettled.

One day, Krish planned a dessert hunt with Rishi and Aryan. That same day, Spoorthy invited him to lunch at her flat and agreed to join the dessert plan later.

After lunch, she didn't come out.

A message arrived instead.

Krish, I can't come today. Let's plan some other time.

He read it, locked his phone, and left with Rishi and Aryan.

Aryan didn't ask anything.

He didn't need to.

Three days later, a small argument broke out between Krish and Rishi—in front of Priya. It ended quickly, but something inside Krish gave way. Conflict unsettled him more than he admitted, especially with people he cared about.

Rishi left first.

Krish and Priya walked toward the metro station. He tried to steady his breathing.

He couldn't.

The tears came without warning.

Priya noticed immediately. She reached for him. He resisted briefly, then let her guide him to sit. She held his hand. Rested his head on her shoulder.

He cried longer than he expected.

“Why doesn't Rishi understand me?” he said between breaths. “Why is he fighting with me instead of helping me?”

She didn't fully understand what he meant. She only said softly, “He cares about you. That's why he scolds you.”

What she didn't know was how much Krish was still carrying from Spoorthy.

Rishi knew.

That was why he had been harsh.

That night, with Priya beside him, the weight eased slightly.

They walked toward the metro station hand in hand. He didn't want to let go. She released his hand gently.

"We'll meet tomorrow," she said.

On the metro, his phone vibrated twice.

One message from Spoorthy.

One from Priya.

He opened Spoorthy's first.

Can I call you?

He replied after reaching his stop.

She called immediately.

"Where are you?"

"Going to my flat."

"So late?"

"I was in campus."

She paused.

"I don't say sorry to anyone," she said quietly. "But that day, it was my mistake."

Krish let out a dry laugh. "You realised it quickly. It's been three days."

She cut the call.

Then called again.

"Let's meet," she said.

"I'll tell you later," he replied.

Only then did he open Priya's message.

It was long. Steady. Considerate.

She said she knew he was dealing with something difficult. That she understood he might not be ready to explain. That she trusted him. That she cared. That she wanted him to be okay.

Call or text me when you reach home.

He reached his flat and replied.

Reached. You free?

She called immediately.

"So," she asked gently, "are you going to tell me what's really happening?"

He wanted to.

But he didn't.

“Thank you for being my friend,” he said instead. “I'm lucky to have you in my life.”

She paused.

“Okay,” she said quietly. “We'll talk tomorrow.”

After the call, he texted Spoorthy.

Temple tomorrow?

The reply came later.

Okay. Done.

CHAPTER 11 — The Last Tries

The temple was quieter than Krish had expected.

The air carried the smell of incense and old stone, the kind of stillness that made even breathing feel noticeable. When he reached the steps, he saw Spoorthy standing there.

She wasn't alone.

Her friend stood beside her, scrolling through her phone, glancing up occasionally. Irritation rose in Krish—sudden and sharp—but he didn't react outwardly. He nodded, offered a small greeting, and sat a short distance away.

They stayed like that for a long time.

No one spoke.

The silence wasn't calming. It felt tight, stretched thin between them. Spoorthy stared ahead. Krish kept his eyes lowered. Her friend shifted restlessly, clearly sensing she had walked into something she didn't understand.

Eventually, Spoorthy leaned toward her friend and whispered something. The friend nodded and moved away, pretending to look at something nearby.

That was when Krish spoke.

"This isn't working," he said quietly. "I've tried. I really have."

Spoorthy didn't look surprised.

"You're not the same with me anymore," he continued. "And neither are you."

She exhaled slowly. "I know you love me," she said. "I can see it. But I can't love you. And I don't want you out of my life either."

The words sounded honest—and impossible.

"So what am I supposed to do?" Krish asked, his voice breaking despite his effort to steady it. "Just stay and suffer?"

Something in her hardened.

"I tried," she said sharply. "For one week. I really tried. I couldn't do it. I was suffering too. And I have my own problems. That's why I didn't come for dessert. That's why I didn't meet your friends."

"Then tell me," he said immediately. "Tell me what you're struggling with."

She shook her head. "I don't share my problems with anyone."

Krish nodded once.

"Then this won't work."

She repeated it, almost helplessly. "I want you. But I can't love you."

It felt like being pulled back into the same place—the same words, the same pain, repeating without resolution.

Then she said something that cut deeper than the rest.

"Our lives don't align. The way we think, behave... everything is different. We could have been good friends. You changed that by proposing."

He looked at her calmly.

"You initiated it first," he said.

Silence followed.

In that silence, something inside him shifted.

"This is the last time," he said quietly. "Let's try once more. Properly. As friends. One final attempt."

She agreed.

He knew he was still attached to her presence. But Priya's steady closeness had begun to weaken that attachment—not erase it, but reduce its hold.

"Why did you bring your friend?" he asked.

"She wanted to visit the temple," Spoorthy replied.

"I won't kidnap you," he said faintly. "Don't worry."

Her friend returned then, smiling awkwardly. "I was also here, by the way."

They laughed lightly.

They left together.

The next day, Krish's phone vibrated.

A new WhatsApp group has been created.

Members: Krish, Spoorthy, Priya

He stared at the screen.

Then he called Priya immediately.

“What's happening?” he asked.

She didn't hesitate. “Yes, what you're seeing is accurate. I ran into Spoorthy by chance. We spoke. She said things were back to being just friends.”

Confusion settled in.

“Check the group,” Priya added.

The message read: Temple tonight.

Priya replied: Okay.

On the call, she said gently, “It's your turn to respond.”

“Okay,” he said, though it didn't feel settled.

On the way, his thoughts spiralled.

What if they talk about Agra?

What if they compare versions?

What if they measure closeness?

He arrived late.

Priya had called him repeatedly during the metro rush.

“Why are you late?” she asked immediately.

“And why aren't you answering?”

Then Spoorthy added from the side,

“He usually answers my calls by the second ring.”

Priya ended the call without a word.

When Krish reached them, both women looked at him—not angry, not smiling—something colder.

He avoided their gaze.

At the temple, Spoorthy asked deliberately,

“So... how was the Agra trip?”

Priya smiled.

“Great. We did a lot of stunts.”

“Oh,” Spoorthy said slowly.

“Nice.”

They spoke openly about him.

“He never hugs me,” Priya said casually.

“I know,” Spoorthy replied.

“He keeps distance with girls.”

For nearly an hour, they talked as if he weren't present.

He changed the topic.

“How did you both meet again?”

They explained—an event, coincidence, sitting together.

Afterwards, they left.

He texted the group: Text me when you reach.

Priya called first.

“How close are you and Spoorthy?” she asked directly.

“Not as close as you and me,” Krish replied without thinking.

They spoke briefly.

He texted Spoorthy next: You reached?

No response.

Two days later, Krish travelled home for family work. He informed Spoorthy.

“Happy journey,” she replied.

That was the last message.

Three days later, she called.

"I thought you forgot me," Krish said.

"I thought you forgot me too," Spoorthy replied.

She said she'd been thinking about the temple. About what he had said.

She wanted to try again—once more.

They spoke for hours. About Agra. About campus. About Priya.

"I understand now," she said.

"I was upset because you didn't tell me."

"It's my life," Krish replied.

"People get jealous sometimes."

"I'm not that kind of person," she said.

They spoke until she reached home.

When she returned to Delhi, the familiar patterns resumed.

Rishi and Krish repaired their bond quietly. This time, Krish didn't mention Spoorthy.

Priya and Rishi began spending more time together.

Rishi grew comfortable around her.

One day, Rishi called.

“Thanks for introducing me to her,” he said.

“She's amazing.”

“That's Priya,” Krish replied.

The call ended when Spoorthy rang.

“I have an idea,” she said.

“Let's go on a trip. You, me, Priya, and your close friends.”

Krish hesitated.

Then agreed.

Rishi agreed on one condition—his roommates and another girl would join too.

Spoorthy protested.

“I said five people. Now it's ten.”

Krish convinced her.

Priya refused initially. He asked her repeatedly before she agreed.

Two self-drive cars were booked.

Car one: Krish, Priya, Rishi, Spoorthy, Rohan

Car two: the rest.

From the start, Spoorthy avoided sitting near Krish.

When he drove, she chose the back seat.

When he helped her, she stepped away.

Rohan and Spoorthy connected easily.

Too easily.

Krish's mood collapsed.

“Are you okay?” everyone asked.

“I'm fine,” he said.

Spoorthy texted: What's wrong with you?

He read it. Didn't respond.

On the return journey, Spoorthy rested her head on Rishi's shoulder.

Rishi slept, unaware.

Krish stopped the car.

Switched seats. Washed his face.

Rishi offered to sit in front.

Spoorthy rearranged the seating again.

Priya sat beside Krish. Leaned on his shoulder.

He held her hand briefly.

This time, it didn't help.

When they reached Delhi, he walked Spoorthy to her flat.

She said nothing until the door.

“Thank you,” she said.

“I enjoyed the trip.”

He nodded.

And walked away.

CHAPTER 12 — When Denial Ends

After the trip, the group looked happy.

Too happy.

Stories flooded Instagram. Reels appeared within hours. Photos surfaced from every angle—laughter caught mid-frame, hands resting on shoulders, moments arranged to look effortless. Rishi and Rohan had iPhones, so most of the pictures lived in their phones first. Krish had all the photos that included him and Spoorthy, simply because no one else in the group had her number.

Spoorthy noticed.

She texted Priya and asked for Rishi's and Rohan's numbers. Then she messaged them directly for the pictures.

Both replied casually.

“We already sent them to Krish.”

There was a pause.

“Will you send me or not?” Spoorthy replied.

They sent everything immediately.

Krish saw it all.

He studied the photos longer than he meant to. Spoorthy laughing. The way she leaned toward Rohan. The ease in her posture—an ease he realised he had never been allowed. Something shifted quietly inside him, not sharply, not all at once, but enough to unsettle what he had been holding together.

In that moment, something became harder to deny.

Whatever he felt for her hadn't faded.

And whatever he wanted from her had never really been friendship.

What he had imagined was never small. It had never been temporary. It had always carried weight—something that stayed, something that lasted. Seeing her move so freely with someone else made that understanding unavoidable.

For the first time, regret arrived without anger.

Maybe I should never have picked up that call, he thought.

But the thought didn't offer relief. It only circled back to the same truth—there was no way to undo what had already formed.

This didn't feel like jealousy anymore.

It felt like loss.

He didn't speak to anyone about it.

Not Rishi.

Not Priya.

Not even Spoorthy.

Two days later, Spoorthy called.

The first thing she asked was, “Why were you so dull on the trip?”

Then, without waiting, “Is it because of me?”

She paused before asking again—more directly.

“Are you still in love with me?”

“We already talked about this,” she continued, as if rehearsing something she had decided earlier.

Krish stopped her.

“I want to ask you something first,” he said. “Why did you avoid me? Why did you act like I was going to hurt you?”

Silence followed.

“You, me, and Priya took a photo together,” he continued. “You stepped away from me. And in the next one—where I wasn’t there—you were close to Rohan. What did I do to you?”

She didn’t respond to the questions. Instead, she moved quickly toward a conclusion.

“Oh. I get it now,” she said. “You’re jealous because I was close to Rohan.”

Her tone hardened. "We already discussed this. It's my life. I felt a positive connection with him, so I connected. What's wrong with that? Why are you behaving like you're my boyfriend?"

"Answer the rest of what I asked," Krish said quietly.

She exhaled. "If I stay close to you, you'll start feeling things again. That's why I distanced myself."

He said only one thing.

"Don't trust everyone you see."

"It's my life," she snapped—and ended the call.

She blocked him.

Two hours later, she unblocked him and called again.

"Why are you behaving like a child?" she asked. "Didn't we already talk about this?"

Then again, "Do you still love me?"

Krish knew what saying yes would invite.

"No," he said immediately.

"Then why were you off?" she asked.

"Because of you," he replied, not carefully, just honestly.

"We were closer than anyone," he continued. "In all these years, you never behaved with me the way you behaved with Rohan. I'm not even talking about love. I'm talking about friendship."

"You don't like girls coming close to you," she said. "You always maintain distance."

"Yes," he replied. "But there are a few people my mind accepts without asking. I thought you were one of them."

"So you're still in love," she said again.

"Why does everything have to come back to love?" he asked.
"Sometimes attachment runs deeper than the word itself."

"Is Priya also just a friend?" she asked. "Then why don't you allow her to hug you?"

"Because it doesn't feel the same," he said. "Not everyone enters the same way."

She went quiet.

"Okay," she said slowly. "You don't love me now, right?"

"No," he said.

He knew the word didn't fully match what he felt.

"Do you remember what happened in the car?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I was asleep."

"You rested on Rishi's shoulder."

"I don't remember," she replied. "I was sick."

"Then why did you change seats later?"

“I didn't want to sit near you.”

“You should feel safe with me,” he said.

She softened slightly. “I understand. But I'm scared. If I get close again, I know things will get complicated. Someone has to draw the line.”

He understood what she meant.

Then he asked, almost quietly, “What about Rohan?”

“I don't know,” she said. “Who knows... if things go right—”

He stopped her.

“Then maybe you should have tried us.”

She laughed lightly. “I'll block you.”

She wasn't entirely joking.

She sounded certain.

He sounded unsure.

A few days later, the group came to Krish's flat.

Rishi called him downstairs. “Come. Get on the bike.”

Whenever Krish felt unsteady, Rishi appeared without asking why.

They rode through Delhi's wide roads. The city passed without comment. One by one, the others left.

Then Krish spoke.

“There's something I need to tell you.”

Rishi changed direction immediately.

This time, Krish told him everything.

Rishi listened, then said only one thing.

“You need to decide. If you don't feel anything, stay friends. If you do—step back now, before this turns into something worse.”

Spoorthy seemed convinced that Krish had moved on.

One day, she came to his flat with her friend and stayed the night.

They went to Barista. He bought her favourite coffee. They returned to the flat, had dinner, talked lightly.

Before sleeping, Krish offered her his favourite blanket.

She refused at first. Then accepted it quietly.

The next morning, they left.

Krish folded the blanket carefully and kept it aside.

He knew it meant something.

He didn't ask himself why.

She kept her distance.

He didn't question it.

NR. Nitish

Love doesn't always break suddenly.

Sometimes it gives warning.

And something had already begun to give way.

CHAPTER 13— The Day He Chose Pain

Spoorthy began coming to Krish's flat regularly.

At first, it didn't feel alarming. Almost comforting. She came without announcements, without making it feel deliberate. Sometimes she stayed for coffee, sometimes for dinner, sometimes just long enough to sit and talk before leaving again.

To Krish, it felt like care.

To him, it felt like reassurance.

It was the first time he had seen her show this kind of attention toward someone outside her family.

He didn't question it.

He didn't ask why.

He told himself it meant something was finally forming—that the closeness he had been waiting for was beginning to take shape.

What he didn't know was how easily intention could be mistaken for presence.

While she continued visiting him, something else was beginning

elsewhere—quietly, without announcement.

Spoorthy and Rohan had started talking more.

Not openly.

Not dramatically.

Gradually.

There were no labels. No definitions. Just conversations that continued longer than expected.

One day, Rohan asked her casually, “Why don't you want anyone to know?”

Spoorthy replied softly, “I don't want complications.”

Rohan heard meaning where there may have been none.

To him, secrecy felt like importance.

Krish went home for some personal work.

This time, most of his flatmates had also returned to their hometowns. Only Rishi stayed back. Krish handed him the keys before leaving.

“I want to stay alone for a few days,” Rishi said.

It was Holi season.

And something shifted during those days.

While Krish was away, Rohan, Rishi, Priya, and Spoorthy celebrated

Holi together. Colours. Laughter. Photos. Priya created a WhatsApp group just for the occasion and began sharing pictures.

One photo remained visible longer than the others.

Spoorthy and Rohan.

Standing close.

Before Krish could react, it disappeared.

Deleted.

That small action made Priya pause.

Something felt unsettled.

She asked Spoorthy casually, "Why did you delete it?"

Spoorthy replied quickly, smoothly, "Krish isn't here. He's sensitive. If he sees us enjoying while he's alone, he'll feel bad."

The explanation sounded reasonable.

Almost too reasonable.

Priya nodded, but the unease remained.

For three days, they stayed together at Krish's flat.

Cooking.

Dancing.

Riding through the city at night.

Playing badminton late.

Laughing without restraint.

Krish knew none of it.

Until he called Priya unexpectedly.

She told him everything.

Every night.

Every moment.

Every detail.

That was when Krish realised Spoorthy had been staying in his flat.

Something inside him gave way.

He ordered her favourite chocolate immediately, not knowing why—only feeling the need to do something that still connected him to her. When Rishi found out, he stopped him.

“I’m not giving it to her,” Rishi said firmly.

He could see something was wrong. He asked Krish directly.

Krish denied it at first.

That night, alone in his hometown, Krish replayed the photos again and again. Smiles. Distance. What wasn't said.

And then he made a decision he knew was wrong even as he made it.

He lied to his parents.

Said he had an exam.

He wasn't confused.

He was aware.

He booked the flight knowing what he was choosing—Spoorthy over honesty, over stability, over himself.

He told himself it was love.

But beneath that thought, another truth existed.

He was moving toward pain willingly, believing proximity might repair something already fractured.

The next day, he told Rishi the truth.

Rishi refused immediately.

“If you book that ticket, I'll call your parents.”

Krish begged.

Rishi felt exhausted. Angry. Helpless.

“This is your last try, isn't it?” he asked.

“Yes,” Krish said.

Rishi tried—slowly, carefully.

Krish didn't stop.

That afternoon, Krish called Priya and told her everything.

She panicked.

She called him repeatedly. Tried reasoning. Tried stopping him.

Krish didn't listen.

He booked the flight.

Spoorthy sensed something was off.

"Why are you coming back so early?" she texted.

"I have nothing to do at home," he replied.

"Is everything okay?"

"Yes."

When he landed in Delhi, he was smiling.

Hopeful.

Unaware.

Rishi and Priya were waiting at the flat.

Neither knew the other knew everything.

They looked at him with an anger he had never seen before.

"You made a mistake," they said together.

That evening, Rishi left.

Only Krish, Priya, and Spoorthy remained.

Spoorthy went inside to speak with her friend.

That was when Priya slapped Krish.

Not violently.

Honestly.

The pain that followed wasn't physical.

It was the weight of being fully seen.

"I know I'm wrong," Krish said quietly. "But it felt right."

Priya walked away.

When Spoorthy returned, she asked directly, "Why did you come?"

Krish answered without thinking.

"Because of you."

Then fear arrived.

Then denial.

Days later, when the group gathered again, Krish noticed what he had been avoiding.

The way Spoorthy rested her hand on Rohan's shoulder.

The ease in her movements.

The familiarity that required no effort.

It wasn't dramatic.

It wasn't obvious.

It was natural.

That was when he understood.

On the way to play badminton that night, Krish cried silently. Priya held his hand, guiding him forward while he broke inwardly.

Spoorthy noticed his red eyes.

Later that night, she called.

He confessed again.

She said no.

Again.

When he spoke through tears, he said something he would later regret.

“You loved me too. You're just scared.”

She ended the call.

She called Rishi instead.

Rishi and Priya came immediately.

Krish collapsed into Rishi's arms and cried until exhaustion replaced pain. They stayed with him through the night.

Later, Spoorthy called Priya to ask how Krish was doing. Priya asked her why she was still reaching out—why she continued to hold space without staying.

Spoorthy cried.

“I know he's good,” she said. “But I can't love him.”

Days later, Spoorthy suggested a visit to ISKCON temple and asked Priya to bring everyone.

Krish refused at first.

Priya insisted.

At the temple, Spoorthy stayed beside Rohan the entire time.

Krish held everything in until he reached home.

Then it surfaced again.

That night, Rishi said, “Block her.”

Krish didn't want to.

But he did.

What followed wasn't relief.

It was guilt.

The belief that loving honestly had ruined something permanent.

That patience might have changed things.

That maybe—someday—he would have heard the words he never did.

I love you.

He removed her from his life.

The only person Spoorthy remained close to was Rohan.

And Krish finally understood—

Some stories don't end because people stop caring.

They end because one person feels completely,

and the other feels enough to stay.

That night, Krish sat alone.

His phone felt heavier than usual.

Spoorthy still existed—not in calls, not in messages, not in memory alone—but in shared spaces.

One group remained.

Krish.

Priya.

Rishi.

Rohan.

He typed slowly.

I've stopped talking to Spoorthy.

I'm choosing peace.

I won't ask anyone to choose sides.

I won't question anyone for choosing differently.

Rishi replied first.

I'm with you.

Priya followed.

Always.

Silence followed.

Krish already understood it.

Rishi said gently, I can't decide for Rohan.

Krish accepted that.

And stepped away.

Not angrily.

Not dramatically.

Completely.

That night, he didn't feel strong.

He felt empty.

But for the first time in months,

he wasn't lying to himself.

CHAPTER 14 — The Place Where Pain Learned Silence

Krish began withdrawing long before anyone noticed.

Not from people—

but from himself.

Some nights, he walked out alone after midnight and sat beside the road, knees drawn close, staring at the same empty stretch of street. There was nothing distinctive about the place. No sign. No light. No reason to stop there.

And yet, he returned.

Again and again.

As if the ground itself required no explanation.

Each night, the same question circled in his mind.

What went wrong?

He hadn't betrayed anyone.

He hadn't lied anything.

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He hadn't asked for more than he was willing to give.

All he had done was love Spoorthy honestly—completely, without calculation.

And now he was carrying the weight of it alone.

That roadside became familiar.

Not comforting.

Not healing.

Just present.

Inside the flat, the heaviness followed him.

Krish moved through his days as if submerged. Rishi tried reasoning with him. Priya tried anger. Neither approach reached him. Eventually, he learned how to appear functional—how to nod, smile, respond just enough to avoid concern.

Alcohol made that easier.

No one encouraged it.

No one stopped it.

And once it settled, restraint disappeared.

One night, he locked himself in the bathroom, sat on the floor, phone trembling in his hands, and typed a long message to Spoorthy. It wasn't measured. It wasn't careful. It said everything he had avoided saying out loud.

He sent it.

Then fell asleep outside the door.

Rishi found the phone later. Read the message. Deleted it. Krish never knew.

Priya tried helping in her own way, but Krish kept distance from everyone. Even casual proximity felt unsettling. At his lowest point, he said something that disturbed even him—that every face blurred into the same one, that his mind no longer separated memory from presence.

Elsewhere in the city, Spoorthy carried her days quietly. She stayed occupied—temples, cafés, shared meals, conversations that remained light. Sometimes she sat in a park with Rohan without speaking, letting time pass without naming it.

Days folded into one another.

Rishi lectured Krish when he could. Priya's frustration became routine—not harsh, but tired. One evening, Rishi took Krish to his favourite café and asked for something simple.

“Just try to be normal.”

Krish tried.

Briefly.

But pain doesn't fade when ignored. It waits.

Then one evening, Priya told him she was travelling to outer Delhi for a few days. Krish offered to drop her—not with intention, just instinct. They met at Barista and spoke about ordinary things. Nothing important.

At the metro station, Priya smiled.

“This is where I get off,” she said.

Without thinking, Krish replied, "Let me come till the last stop."

She hesitated.

Then nodded.

Inside the metro, Priya noticed his reflection in the glass. The tension sat openly on his face. Nothing hidden anymore.

He held her hand the entire ride.

Didn't speak.

Didn't look away.

When the last station arrived, he followed her toward the exit. They walked a few steps apart before he stopped suddenly and called her name.

She turned.

He moved toward her and held her tightly.

People stared.

Neither reacted.

Priya didn't ask questions. She didn't interrupt. She simply held him and stayed still long enough for the moment to pass through him.

The warmth didn't confuse him.

It didn't overwhelm him.

It steadied him.

When they separated, neither said anything.

Back at the flat, Krish lay on his bed staring at the ceiling fan, still aware of her presence in small details—the scent on his shirt, the quiet left behind. He didn't change. He didn't move.

For the first time in months, his thoughts didn't return elsewhere.

They never spoke about that moment.

Not to anyone.

Not to each other.

When Priya returned to Delhi a week later, they met often. Something had shifted. Krish avoided embraces now, but he didn't let go of her hand. They walked through campus like that—unhurried, unremarkable, steady.

The Arts Faculty became familiar.

Later, Rishi joined them there.

When Rishi was present, Krish released Priya's hand naturally. No explanation was needed. Boundaries returned without friction. Respect remained intact.

Priya became a constant.

Not as an answer.

Not as a solution.

As presence.

Slowly, Krish changed. The pain remained, but it no longer dictated his

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movements. And gradually, something he had overlooked became clear to him.

He had spent years chasing a feeling that never stayed.

And missed the person who never left.

Some days, he pulled away.

Priya returned anyway.

Only then did he understand the difference between intensity and steadiness.

Between attachment and support.

As college life moved toward its end, Krish stood in unfamiliar territory—

Not healed.

Not whole.

But no longer alone.

CHAPTER 15— When Love Stopped Being Gentle

Krish believed he was improving.

Not because the pain had disappeared,

but because he had learned how to move around it.

Days passed without collapse. Conversations happened when required. Silence began to resemble control. He mistook distance for stability.

That belief fractured inside a temple.

The space was crowded. Bells rang continuously. Prayers overlapped. People moved with quiet urgency, each carrying something they did not know how to ask for aloud.

He saw Spoorthy.

There was no warning.

No gradual recognition.

Just her—close enough to remove choice.

His body reacted before thought arrived.

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He told himself to remain steady.

To behave normally.

To leave it untouched.

It lasted only minutes.

He walked out without turning back, booked a bike automatically, and went straight to his flat. When the door closed, restraint dissolved.

He cried—not loudly, not dramatically—but with the fatigue of someone who had been bracing for too long.

He reached for his phone to call Rishi.

Then stopped.

He already knew what would be said.

And part of him wasn't ready to hear it.

That night, he returned to the roadside—the place that asked nothing. He sat there for hours, revisiting moments without sequence, replaying choices that no longer felt like choices at all.

He was talking to himself that, All I did was love her.

Why does it feel like I destroyed myself doing it?

From that night onward, Krish began disappearing. He tried to understand how something that began without harm had ended here.

From that night onward, he withdrew further.

Priya called.

He didn't answer.

She called again.

Still nothing.

By the next day, her calls had stacked into double digits.

He remained silent.

When his roommates suggested stepping out, he declined without explanation.

They left.

An hour later, the doorbell rang.

He opened the door.

Priya stood there.

She didn't speak immediately. She looked at him closely, long enough that whatever she saw reached her before thought did.

She slapped him.

The sound was sharp. Brief. Final.

Then she pulled him into an embrace.

Hard. Desperate.

“Don't disappear like this,” she said.

“You're the only person I trust here. Please talk to me.”

Krish tried to step back.

She didn't allow it.

“I feel safe with you,” she said quietly.

The words unsettled him.

They sat together. He apologised more than once. His crying returned—less forceful, but deeper. He asked questions without answers.

“I cry every day,” he said.

“Am I becoming weak?”

She responded steadily.

“No.”

“You're overwhelmed. That's different.”

They stayed like that on sofa until exhaustion replaced thought.

When his roommates returned, Krish moved carefully and asked them to keep their voices low. Later, he woke Priya gently, walked her to the metro, and returned alone.

On the way back, unease replaced exhaustion.

Something was shifting.

And he couldn't tell into what.

The farewell followed soon after.

The auditorium was full—laughter layered over nostalgia, people already preparing to miss what they hadn't left yet.

He saw Spoorthy again.

This time, he didn't freeze.

He turned away deliberately.

Priya noticed. She greeted Spoorthy briefly, then returned to Krish when she saw Krish watching Spoorthy and Rohan together—comfortable, unaffected.

She held his hand.

He held it too tightly.

He made it through the event.

Outside, he didn't.

The collapse came quietly. Rishi noticed immediately. He handed Krish the bike keys and told Priya to ride with him. They moved through the city without direction. Priya held him from behind. He didn't speak.

Later, Krish booked a cab. Priya stayed with him.

The flat was empty.

Inside, everything blurred.

He held her again—sudden, unsteady—and collapsed onto the bed.

“I ruined everything,” he said.

“I don't recognise myself anymore.”

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Priya reacted sharply.

“How long are you going to do this?” she said. “Every time you see her, you fall apart. This isn't strength. It's damage.”

He stepped away.

Then returned.

And this time, something crossed.

Not desire.

Not intention.

Disorientation.

He held her again—not with clarity, but because he no longer trusted his own stillness. She hesitated. Asked him to stop.

He repeated words he had heard before, “I feel safe when I am with you” without fully understanding them.

Priya froze.

She didn't push him away.

Not because it was right,

but because she could see how close he was to breaking entirely.

They slept.

Not peacefully.

Not comfortably.

Only because exhaustion demanded it.

Morning brought no resolution.

Only awareness.

And beneath the weight of it all, Krish understood something for the first time:

When attachment refuses to loosen,

it stops being care.

It becomes something heavier.

Something that leaves marks on everyone it reaches.

CHAPTER 16 — When Trust Broke Louder Than Love

Krish began writing things down.

Not stories.

Not poetry.

Lists.

Moments.

Sequences.

He recorded the days he felt steady and the nights he didn't. The exact reasons his chest tightened. The thoughts that frightened him. The ones that felt unfamiliar even to himself. Writing became a way to verify his own presence, because he was afraid he was slipping out of it.

Somewhere between those pages, a decision formed.

He needed distance from Priya.

Not because she had harmed him.

Because she mattered too much.

One evening, Priya called.

"I'm coming to your flat," she said, without hesitation.

Krish was already there.

He lied.

"I'm not in home," he said. "Go to Rishi's place."

She refused immediately.

"Without you, I won't go there," she said. "There will be his roommates. I won't feel comfortable."

The words settled heavily.

They sounded like trust.

Like reliance.

Like something he wasn't prepared to hold.

He continued to withdraw.

A few days later, after dropping her at her hostel, he stopped her near the gate and held her hand.

What he said next shifted everything.

"Please stop talking to me," he said quietly. "When I care deeply, people leave. I don't want that to happen with you. You matter to me. I don't want you to resent me later. Let's end this here."

She didn't respond.

She slapped him.

The sound carried far enough that people turned.

Krish stood frozen—shocked, exposed, unable to place himself inside the moment. Priya immediately reached for him, apologising, but he had already turned away.

She ran inside, crying.

Later that night, her friends called him, saying she had locked herself in her room and wasn't responding.

He said he would call.

He didn't.

When he finally tried, he realised she had blocked him.

Something inside him collapsed.

He cried uncontrollably. Accused himself of being harmful, useless, a burden, someone who only existed to hurt people. Typed long apologies in his notes, deleting and rewriting them repeatedly. Eventually, overwhelmed, in frustration and pain, he blocked her as well.

For two days, he withdrew completely.

No food.

No sleep.

No conversation.

On the second night, Rishi called and asked him to come over. Krish ignored it—until he heard Priya's voice in the background.

That sound broke what remained of his restraint.

He called back and said he was coming. As he left, he unblocked Priya and called her.

She answered immediately.

“So you unblocked me now?” she asked.

His reply came sharp. “You blocked me first.”

Her voice cracked.

“I called you every half hour for two days,” she said. “I kept saying sorry. I didn't know what else to do.”

She admitted she had never reacted like this before. That she didn't understand why she was reacting this way now.

Guilt surfaced.

Anger remained louder.

When he asked where she was, she hesitated.

“Rishi's place.”

The word struck him unexpectedly.

He raised his voice. Accused her of abandoning what she had said earlier. Of replacing him. Of treating him as something temporary.

She tried to explain—said she wasn't stable, that she didn't know

where else to go.

The argument escalated.

Krish said things that sounded final even to him. About disappearing. About losing meaning. When she asked where he was, he answered vaguely.

She understood.

Rishi insisted on bringing her to him. On the way, she explained the argument.

When Krish saw Rishi approaching, panic overtook reason. He ran—down a service road, into narrow lanes, without direction. Priya followed until a barking dog startled her. He turned back instinctively.

They found each other again.

She apologised. Tried to explain. Krish refused to let her come to his flat, speaking in ways meant to distance rather than clarify. At one point, overwhelmed, he struck himself repeatedly, accusing her of ruining everything around him.

That moment fractured her.

“Without you,” she said quietly, “I won't be happy.”

Krish laughed—not from humour, but from collapse. He repeated the words without kindness. She cried.

Rishi eventually left, asking Krish not to abandon her.

The night ended on the road.

They talked. Argued. Understood fragments. Agreed on nothing

completely.

By morning, she returned to her hostel.

For a week, they didn't meet.

Rishi returned her bag without comment.

That week remained heavy for both of them.

Days later, when no one else was home, Priya came to Krish's flat.

There was no conversation.

No explanations.

She hugged him.

He hugged her back.

They held on longer than intended—not from desire, but exhaustion.

They lay down on bed without speaking.

Closeness blurred into vulnerability. Vulnerability edged toward something neither had planned.

When Krish moved closer, Priya stopped him immediately.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I don't know,” he said honestly.

She explained that moments like this sometimes happened—that something similar had occurred in her past and had been resolved.

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They stopped.

Immediately.

They acknowledged the boundary they had crossed. Agreed not to repeat it. Not to discuss it. Not to let it define them.

Nothing outwardly changed.

But something inside had shifted.

Their bond continued—quieter now, heavier—carrying a weight neither of them yet knew how to name.

CHAPTER 17— When Everyone Moved Forward, and He Stayed Behind

Laughter continued for a while.

Parties carried on. Plans were spoken about casually, as if time would keep stretching without resistance. Then the final semester dates were released, and something shifted.

The future arrived abruptly.

Conversations changed tone. Some spoke about returning home permanently. Some discussed examinations, preparation, cities they had never lived in but were already imagining.

Krish, Rishi, and Priya were supposed to be part of that movement forward.

Krish wasn't.

His attention remained fixed elsewhere.

Arguments. Silences. Unfinished conversations. The exhaustion that

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followed emotional collapse. Loss that didn't belong to one person but seemed to arrive from all directions at once.

He began writing again.

Not with the intention of understanding. Only to remain functional.

One night, after hours of writing, he walked out alone and went to the roadside where he had learned how to sit without explanation. The place did not offer comfort. It offered stillness. He played quiet music, not to distract himself but to match what already existed inside him. He read messages he had written to himself and cried.

At first quietly.

Then without restraint.

A man passing by noticed.

"Are you okay?" the man asked.

Krish wiped his face and nodded. "I'm fine."

"If you want to talk," the man said, pausing briefly.

"It's nothing," Krish replied. "Just a small thing."

The man waited a moment, then walked away.

That moment lingered.

Krish realised something unsettling. His pain had reached a point where it no longer needed explanation to be seen.

That night, he made himself a promise.

He would stop looking back. He would focus on exams. He would lock the past away.

For a while, he managed to function.

He completed what was required. Stayed disciplined. Remained outwardly stable. But the weight did not lift. It settled deeper.

He didn't believe the promise entirely. He needed it only as a structure, something to stand inside while everything else felt unstable.

He spoke to Priya again.

The conversation carried hesitation on both sides. Not distance. Just uneven ground.

He spoke to Rishi next.

Rishi said he would move into Krish's flat for a few days.

Krish agreed immediately, believing proximity might repair what had been damaged.

When Rishi arrived, things felt almost normal. Familiar routines returned. Laughter existed without effort.

Soon after, the group planned a farewell at a resort.

Everyone drank.

Krish did not.

He stayed present. Stayed attentive. Stayed clear.

Rohan remained distant. Enough for Krish to notice.

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That night, the group sat together talking about memories, futures, failures, hopes. When Rishi spoke, the group listened.

He spoke about each person, acknowledging what they meant to him.

When he reached Krish, his voice changed slightly.

He spoke of kindness, emotional depth, loyalty. Then he said something else.

That something had been broken.

Trust.

Krish understood immediately.

He imagined what might have happened if he had been drinking. The escalation. The damage. The inability to stop.

Rishi smiled.

“No anger,” he said. “Only clarity.”

Then he added something that steadied Krish.

“Whatever happens, I won't leave. Friends don't disappear when mistakes happen. They stay.”

Relief arrived quietly.

Later that night, Priya messaged.

She said she was leaving Delhi for a few days. After returning, she would stay at his flat briefly. Then she might go home permanently.

Krish listened.

He did not argue.

While the group continued talking, he put his phone down and jumped into the pool.

Laughter followed. Others jumped in.

No one noticed how long he stayed underwater.

The next day, people returned in fragments. Some to Krish's place. Some elsewhere.

Slowly, roommates began leaving Delhi. Promises were made. Reassurances offered.

Priya remained unreachable during her time away.

Krish had another place.

Near Kartavya Path. Under a tree close to India Gate.

He went there when solitude became necessary. He told no one.

When Priya returned, he took her there.

He spoke about everything.

Where they first met.

When closeness began.

When they became close.

Their first fight.

The first time he cried in front of her.

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The first time he held her hand.
The first hug.
All the chai spots.
All the coffee places.
He showed her the Ama Café photo.
He did not speak about the kiss.

He laughed about their fight over trust.
“You still don't agree,” he said.

“And now,” he added softly, “we're sitting here alone. My favourite place. Only you and I know it.”

She cried.

“I'll miss you,” she said.

He told her she could call whenever she needed him.

Later that night, they returned to the roadside place. Rishi arrived with Rohan and Jatin. They talked about futures, ordered food, laughed.

Rishi looked at the road where Krish had once jumped.

“How did you not get hurt?” he asked lightly.

Rohan asked what he meant.

Priya shook her head.

Rishi said it was a long story.

The night passed.

The next morning, Priya explained why she avoided a certain room.

“It makes me anxious,” she said.

When Krish asked what he should tell others, she answered calmly.

“You did it. So live with it.”

He shattered his phone in response.

He loved that phone.

Priya offered to pay.
He refused.

Rishi sensed something unresolved — misunderstood again.

Krish wrote Priya a letter.
He knew she loved letters.

He had never said I love you back when she said it casually to friends.
He always laughed, said it was meant for his future wife.

But this time, he crossed that boundary.

I know I never say this.
But today I'm crossing my words.
I love you, Priya.
No matter what happened, you are my comfort.
I'm sorry for everything.
I hope you understand.

He placed it in her bag.

She didn't know.

At the station, she said she wouldn't cry.

Krish stood on the other side of the platform.

Five minutes left.

Everything rushed back at once.

Then Priya hugged him from behind, he broke.

He kissed her hair gently.

“Don't make me cry,” she said. “You're an emotional person.”

People noticed.

Assumptions formed.

She left.

The platform emptied.

The noise returned.

Krish stood there longer than necessary, holding the space she had occupied until it disappeared.

Rishi hugged him.

“It'll be okay,” he said.

Krish went back alone.

Rohan didn't ask questions, but too many moments didn't fit together. The jump. The silence. The hug. The tears.

He didn't understand everything yet.

But he knew something had happened that no one was saying out

loud.

Rishi understood, too — something he had never expected from Krish.

Krish returned to his flat.

Delhi stayed awake as it always did.

And for the first time since arriving in the city, Krish felt he no longer belonged there.

CHAPTER 18 — When Distance Began Doing the Damage

Krish booked a ticket home for two months.

The train was scheduled five days later.

Those five days stretched longer than the semester that had just ended.

There was too much left to do and very little space inside him to do it properly. The flat had to be emptied. Every object accumulated over two years had to be packed — utensils, books, clothes, boxes that no longer held meaning but still demanded responsibility.

Before the other roommates left Delhi, they brought all their belongings into the flat. Things they planned to collect after a few months.

Everything was left behind.

Everything was left with Krish.

By the time he finished packing, eight large cartons stood stacked

against the wall.

Packing itself was manageable.

Storage was not.

They needed somewhere to keep the boxes without continuing to pay rent. Krish contacted the flat owner's family and explained. They said they were out of the city but would return by evening.

They didn't.

He waited.

The next day passed the same way.

Finally, a day before Krish was supposed to leave Delhi, the owner called.

He said he would return after three days. The boxes could be kept then.

By that point, Krish had no time left.

Rishi was still staying in the flat.

Krish explained the situation. The luggage. The delay. The pressure of leaving.

Rishi listened and said he would handle it.

He said he was staying back anyway. That he would be the last one to leave.

Krish trusted him.

The next day, Krish left Delhi.

No one came to the station.

Except Rishi.

Krish hugged him before boarding. Standing there, he felt the absence more sharply than he had expected. For a moment, he thought of Priya — how she would have come without needing to be asked.

The thought stayed with him as the train moved.

Home did not feel like relief.

The weight travelled with him.

The questions. The regret. The unfinished conversations. None of it stayed behind.

The following day, instead of returning directly home, Krish booked a ticket to Priya's city.

He wanted to see her.

She met him at the station and hugged him without hesitation.

He asked her if she had noticed anything. He was asking about the letter.

She didn't understand.

He didn't explain.

She invited him home. He declined, offering a reason that sounded casual enough. She dropped him at the bus stand.

Krish went home.

Back in Delhi, the flat owner returned two days later.

Rishi answered the door.

They planned to move the boxes the next day.

When they tried, it became clear they couldn't manage it alone. The cartons were too heavy. They needed help.

Rohan and Jatin were still staying nearby, preparing to move to a new place. They spent an entire day shifting the luggage.

By evening, everyone was exhausted.

The next day, no one was available.

Rishi was left alone.

He called Krish and explained.

Krish contacted the owner and requested a delay. The owner agreed, but said he was leaving Delhi again and could not wait to collect the keys.

Rishi was already under strain.

He was expected to vacate the flat soon himself.

Krish called again, more carefully.

He reminded Rishi that he had trusted him with everything. That there was no one else in Delhi.

Rishi reacted sharply.

The conversation escalated.

Krish understood something then.

He wasn't asking to be understood.

He was asking to be acknowledged.

The call ended badly.

Later, Krish asked an old flatmate to speak to Rishi instead.

That conversation resolved the situation.

The keys were handed over.

But something had shifted.

When Krish apologised days later, Rishi accepted.

Distance remained.

During all of this, something else happened.

Priya found the letter.

It had been hidden in her bag all this time.

She read it. Her hands shook as she folded it back precisely the way she found it — as if putting it away could undo what it had already

changed.

She video-called Krish immediately.

She was crying and laughing at the same time.

“So you finally said 'I love you,’” she said through tears. “I think your future wife will definitely hate me.”

She joked about hugging first and saying it first.

She almost said something else — stopped after two words.

Krish understood.

They let the silence hold it.

She showed him her house.

He showed her his home. His pet.

For a while, everything else disappeared.

She asked about Rishi.

“He's fine,” Krish said.

“You can talk to him directly,” he added.

“I will,” she replied. “Today I had time, so I called you.”

Krish didn't tell her about the fight.

He didn't want to poison this space.

They began talking every day — long calls, late nights. The bond felt stronger. Safer.

Again, Krish noticed the pattern.

Whenever he was breaking, someone arrived.

This time, it was Priya.

Back in Delhi, Rishi and Rohan stayed together briefly before Rishi left.

Rohan absorbed everything quietly.

All the fragments.

All the silence.

All the unsaid things.

Time passed.

Krish later asked Rishi to visit his home so they could surprise Priya together on her birthday.

Rishi agreed.

The plan never happened.

Instead, Krish travelled elsewhere with friends during that week.

On Priya's birthday, he tried ordering a cake. It wasn't possible.

They spoke for hours on a video call instead.

She spoke to Krish's friend. They laughed.

Midnight passed.

Her birthday ended.

"I wish you were here now," she texted.

Krish called again.

She cried.

She said she felt lonely.

Krish understood something then.

Staying connected does not always mean staying close

CHAPTER 19 — When Staying Started Hurting More Than Leaving

Two months passed.

The distance did not weaken the bond between Krish and Priya. If anything, it made it steadier. They spoke openly. There were fewer misunderstandings. Priya continued therapy for what had happened earlier. She told Krish about it without hesitation. Eventually, she stopped going when the sessions became unaffordable.

Krish returned to Delhi earlier than planned.

He wanted to spend his birthday with the people he still considered close.

Before coming back, he called Rishi.

He said he was returning.

Rishi said he was already in the city.

Krish asked why he hadn't mentioned it.

Rishi said he thought he had.

He hadn't.

When Krish suggested staying with him until finding a new place, Rishi hesitated. He said the flat was far. Suggested Jatin's instead. Krish offered to travel. Rishi repeated that Jatin's would be better.

Krish understood.

Later, Aryan confirmed that Rohan was staying with Rishi.

That information was enough.

Krish understood.

Rohan was the reason.

He blamed himself immediately. Thought about all the times he had given his flat to everyone — for parties, for stays, for comfort.

This is your fault, he told himself.

You trusted people. Now bear it.

Krish stayed elsewhere. First with Jatin. Then with Aryan.

Rishi didn't call once.

For the first time in years, Krish felt absent from a space he once belonged to.

He cried alone.

He wanted to call Priya — to tell her everything — but stopped himself. She was already struggling. He didn't want to add weight.

He found a new flat and sent pictures to Rishi.

The reply was brief.

One afternoon, Krish visited Rishi.

Rishi said “Hi” — like he was greeting a stranger.

Krish stayed briefly and left quietly.

Krish left soon after.

The next day, while unpacking, Priya called.

She said she was coming to Delhi.

Krish cried without warning.

He told her it was irritation in his eyes.

She laughed.

She stayed at her aunt's place. Krish didn't care — just knowing she was in Delhi was enough.

When they met, she introduced him to her brother. They spoke easily. Walked through the city. At India Gate, photos were taken. Priya held his hand. Krish hesitated. She adjusted quietly.

She showed her brother Krish's familiar place near Kartavya Path.

That night, Krish returned home.

He called Aryan for coffee.

“I'm in the hospital,” Aryan said.

“What happened?”

“Rishi got food poisoning.”

“Which hospital?”

“Don't come,” Aryan said. “We're sending him home.”

Krish spoke to Rishi briefly.

“Take care,” Krish said.

From that day, he called Rishi every day.

Krish's birthday arrived.

Priya said she was going to Varanasi.

Krish slept through the day.

At night, the entire gang appeared at his flat.

Surprise.

Then Priya appeared.

He laughed. Thanked everyone.

Cake. Pushups. Noise. Laughter.

Everyone left.

Priya stayed.

“I didn't go,” she said. “I didn't want you to feel alone.”

Krish cried and hugged her.

“That's all I needed,” he said.

They slept in separate rooms.

The next day, they went to the temple. It rained on the way back.

Priya wanted a bike ride.

Aryan came. Rohan joined.

They rode until they were soaked.

Later, Krish gave Priya his clothes.

That night, she spoke about her struggles—her independence, loneliness, and her parents.

Krish found her a PG. Balcony. Metro-facing. Loud.

She liked it.

He spoke to her parents. Reassured her brother.

She shifted.

They sat in Krish's favourite café.

“How's your life?” she asked.

“Okay,” he said.

She knew it wasn't.

He told her about Rishi.

"I'll talk to him," she said. "But you try first."

Rishi returned to Delhi healthy. He wanted to change flats.

Krish helped pack everything. Asked him to stay.

Rishi stayed — but not the same.

Studying. Calls. Always busy.

When Krish asked him to eat together, Rishi refused.

Slowly, Krish began breaking again.

Rishi found a new flat. Everyone helped.

Rishi gave Krish his spare keys.

"You're good at keeping things safe," he said.

Krish kept trying — even though it hurt.

One afternoon, the group planned to eat together.

Krish was invited last.

After lunch, everyone exited the metro. Everyone took auto except Krish, Rishi, and Rohan.

Rishi and Rohan ran suddenly.

"Run!" they shouted.

Krish ran.

When he reached the turn, they were gone.

He waited thirty minutes.

No call.

Three hours later, Rishi called.

“Where did you go?”

“You disappeared,” Krish said quietly.

“I thought you went home,” Rishi replied.

“Never mind,” Krish said. “Thanks for lunch.”

He cried alone.

He isolated himself completely.

Priya called.

No response.

One evening, Priya rang the bell. His flatmate opened the door.

She entered the kitchen.

Krish stood there with headphones on, eyes closed, tears falling.

She held his hands.

“Is it Rishi?” she asked.

He didn't answer.

Later, when Rishi came to pick up his keys, Priya and Rishi laughed together.

Krish felt invisible.

That night, he cried silently.

He texted Priya:
Please don't do this. I only have you.

She came to wake him.

He pretended to sleep.

She didn't hold his hand.

Something inside him cracked completely.

The next morning, Krish sat at Kartavya Path all day.

Ignored calls. Wrote everything down.

Watched people live.

That night, Priya found him after a nightmare.

Water. Silence. Her hand on his back.

“What's wrong?” she asked.

“Everything,” he said. “Everyone. You too.”

She stayed.

The City That Let Me Go

The next day, she returned late. Drank one peg.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

She slept with her head on his lap.

Krish smiled faintly. Took a photo.

But anger stayed.

It was growing.

Burning.

And for the first time, he understood the real fear.

He wasn't scared of being alone anymore.

He was scared of what he was becoming while trying not to be.

CHAPTER 20 — When Even Hope Started Hurting

No one was constant in Krish's life anymore — except pain.

What began with Spoorthy never truly ended. It moved through friendships, trust, and places that once felt safe. It stayed quietly, patiently, until he lost almost everything.

The next morning, Priya woke up, freshened up, and they had lunch together.

It felt ordinary.
Almost peaceful.

Then she left.

And something inside Krish shut down.

From that day onward, he became quiet. Slow. Controlled. Not healed — buried. He pressed everything down, layer by layer, so that nothing could rise again. His smile disappeared. Even when he laughed, it didn't reach his eyes.

After a few days, he called Aryan and told him everything — Rishi's distance, the silence, the exclusion.

Aryan listened carefully and said something that held Krish together for a moment.

“I don't want to see you and Rishi like this,” he said. “I learned friendship by watching you both. You were there for me when no one else was. Now it's my turn.”

Two years ago, when Aryan fought with the entire group, everyone left him — except Krish. Krish had brought him back.

That memory mattered now.

Aryan spoke to Rishi.

But something shifted.

Aryan didn't say everything. He didn't show it directly. But slowly, he began speaking for Rishi instead of about him.

Soon after, Rishi planned a movie with everyone. He called Krish.

Krish refused.

For the first time, he chose himself — knowing that going would only reopen wounds.

That evening, Priya called.

“You're coming to the movie, right?”

“No.”

She hesitated. “Rishi asked me to call you.”

Krish still refused.

She added, "When I asked Rishi what's happening, he said he doesn't want to force anyone. He said later, no one should complain."

Krish stayed silent.

"Should I go?" she asked.

"What did you say when he asked you?" Krish replied.

"I said yes."

"Then go," Krish said. "I'm okay. I'm not your boyfriend. It's your life."

Inside, he believed she wouldn't.

She did.

That moment stayed.

From then on, Krish avoided everyone — except Priya.

One day, he called her.

"Where are you? Let's meet."

"I'm at my friend's place," she said. "We'll meet after an hour."

"Okay."

Then he heard a voice in the background.

"You'll stay for dinner, right?" Rishi asked her.

Something broke permanently.

Krish didn't shout. Didn't question. Didn't accuse.

"Thank you, Priya," he said — and cut the call.

She called again. And again.

The third time, he answered.

"I can explain—"

"Leave it," Krish said calmly. "I don't care."

She rushed to explain anyway.

"Why are you telling me this?" he asked. "I didn't even ask."

He texted her:

You lied to me again.

Later, he saw her walking alone on the road.

He stopped.

They went for coffee with his flatmates. Krish didn't speak to her once.

Near her place, he asked everyone to leave.

She hugged him.

He gently moved away.

"Please don't," he said. "I'm scared now. I've seen everyone leave. And now you're on that list."

He spoke about everything he had been holding.

"I thought you wouldn't go to the movie. But you did. I never expected to see you at his place."

She got angry.

"It's my life," she said. "I can meet whoever I want."

"I'm not questioning that," he replied. "I'm asking why you lied."

Then, quietly, "Wherever you go, do whatever you want — just don't betray me again."

The argument grew.

Old wounds returned.

"Go anywhere," Krish said. "Just come to me at the end. See me. That's all I'm asking."

"I can't," she replied. "Everyone is my friend."

He asked the question that destroyed him.

"Do Rishi and I have equal places in your heart?"

"Yes," she said. "Everyone is equal."

That word shattered him.

"Are you hiding anything else from me?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What?"

"I told my brother about the time you tried to kiss me."

Something inside Krish died.

He walked away without a word.

Half a kilometre later, he stopped.

Turned back.

She was still standing there.

Waiting.

He hugged her — tightly, calmly.

"This is the truth," he said. "That moment wasn't desire. It was an escape. I wanted you to leave me so I wouldn't have to say it."

He stepped back.

"Until today, I blamed myself. But now I understand — I was protecting myself the only way I knew."

She broke down.

Cried openly.

Krish felt nothing.

No anger.

No relief.

Only emptiness.

"Go home," he said. "We'll talk tomorrow."

She did.

That night, walking alone, Krish realised something terrifying.

There would be no Priya anymore.

The loneliness crushed him.

The next day, she was different.

Cold. Clear.

“You kissed me knowing it was wrong,” she said. “You did it to leave.”

“Yes,” Krish replied. “I didn't dare to ask you to.”

“Then I will,” she said.

He begged.

“I only have you.”

“Don't talk emotionally,” she replied. “I don't care anymore.”

They met once more.

She kept a distance.

“You made most of the mistakes,” she said. “Mine don't compare.”

She left.

Krish stayed.

Weeks passed.

The City That Let Me Go

He isolated himself completely.

No calls.

No messages.

No people.

Only pain.

Only silence.

And the understanding that when the last person leaves, even hope becomes something that hurts.

CHAPTER 21 — When the Body Finally Spoke

The next day, Krish called Aryan for coffee.

Aryan refused.

That refusal began a loop that lasted for two weeks.

Krish woke up crying.

Hated himself.

Ate without tasting anything.

Cried again.

Hated himself again.

Slept.

And then woke up to repeat it.

He began walking every day to places where laughter once existed — cafés, streets, corners that still remembered them. He sat alone and wrote apology messages endlessly in his notes app, imagining a future where he might send them to Priya.

Every night, the same faces returned in his dreams — Priya, Rishi, the gang — playing the same scenes again and again.

He started sitting in the café where they had last met. He ordered chai and left it undrunk—day after day. Hundreds of rupees were wasted

on untouched cups. He didn't care.

He had no one left to talk to.

While Krish was breaking alone, Priya needed someone to speak to.

From the very next day, she began going to Rishi's place frequently. They roamed together, laughed together — as if Krish had never existed.

After a few days, Rishi sensed something had happened between Krish and Priya. He asked her. She told him about the kiss.

She did not tell him about the three weeks of emotional closeness that came before it.

Without seeking clarification, without hearing both sides, Rishi trusted her completely.

From that day onward, the entire gang — Rishi, Aryan, Jatin, Rohan — avoided Krish entirely.

Trips happened without him.
Celebrations happened without him.

Once, they never went anywhere without Krish.

Now, they didn't want him at all.

It felt as if he had been erased.

One day, Krish called his hometown best friend and told him

everything — except the kiss. He still kept his word.

His friend said only one thing.

“Permit me. I won't leave them.”

Krish refused.

“I wanted to leave them,” he said quietly. “But instead, they left me.”

That was when his hands started shaking again.

He felt dizzy standing on the road. He rushed back to his flat and collapsed into sleep.

The next day, he tried to act normal.

His body didn't allow it.

While talking to his roommates, his vision blurred.

And then he fainted.

He could hear voices but couldn't respond. His hands shook uncontrollably. His legs trembled. His roommates panicked and dragged him into a rickshaw.

“Stay awake,” they kept shouting. “Nothing will happen to you.”

At the hospital, one of them carried him inside. The doctor immediately gave him an injection.

Krish drifted into sleep.

The City That Let Me Go

He woke suddenly, confused, calling Priya's name — imagining her standing in front of him.

The doctor rushed in and said he shouldn't be awake yet.

He slept again.

His parents were called.

By morning, his cousin had arrived, booked a flight, packed his luggage, and sent him home while he was still dizzy.

At the airport, Krish sent Priya a photo — an IV still attached to his hand.

She saw it.

She didn't reply.

At home, Krish hid the real reason behind his collapse. He told his parents it was something else.

He understood what was happening to him.

Panic attacks.

Anxiety attacks.

He stayed home for three weeks, carrying everything silently so his parents wouldn't worry.

Then he returned to Delhi.

At the airport, his hometown best friend hugged him tightly.

“If anything happens again,” he said, “I’ll come to Delhi myself.”

Krish nodded.

He arrived with one thought:

I don’t care about anyone anymore. I’ll live peacefully.

That resolve didn’t last two days.

He saw stories of the gang enjoying — and collapsed again.

The panic attacks returned weekly.

His roommates made him lie down every time, precisely as the doctor had instructed.

They told him to call his parents.

He refused.

“If you don’t,” they said, “we will.”

So he called — and told them only about the panic attacks.

His parents told him to come home immediately.

Krish booked a flight.

He believed this would be his last time in Delhi.

Before leaving, he decided to talk to Rishi.

He went to Rishi's place and knocked.

From inside, he heard Priya laughing.

Something inside him shattered.

He stepped away for air.

Another panic attack hit.
He collapsed.

When his flatmates arrived, a stranger was holding him.

This time, Krish heard nothing.

Rishi came down alone.

They explained everything.

Rishi held Krish.

He didn't say, Let's take him upstairs.

He said, Let's take him to your place.

Krish regained partial consciousness and hugged Rishi tightly.

Then collapsed again.

They took him back to his flat.

When he woke, Rishi was holding his hand. Aryan came too. They stayed, but said little.

At 2 a.m., Krish whispered, "No one is being nice to me."

Then softly, "Priya left me."

They didn't take him to the airport.

Krish wanted to see Priya.

His roommates refused.

He called her anyway.

She came.

She sat far from him.

He told her about the panic attacks.

She said, "It's common."

He asked her to be kind again.

She replied, "Everything is over."

He didn't tell her he had collapsed that night.

"If you're still hoping about promises," she added, "lose hope. I told everything to Rishi."

Krish nodded.

"Okay."

She stood up.

"Rishi and Aryan are waiting for me," she said.

Krish smiled faintly. "Don't worry. I won't kidnap you."

"They care about my safety," she replied.

He walked her down anyway.

Even in his unstable condition.

That night, alone, Krish spoke to himself in the dark.

"They're happy without you.

You were never happy with them — or without them."

And for the first time, he understood something terrifying.

He wasn't afraid of being alone anymore.

He was afraid of how much pain a human being could carry —
and still wake up the next day.

CHAPTER 22 — When the Body Started Remembering Before the Mind

Krish returned home carrying everything he had never said out loud.

Leaving Delhi didn't take the pain away. It travelled with him — inside his chest, behind his eyes, lodged in his breath. His heart still wanted the same people, the same voices, the same comfort.

But his body refused.

It had reached its limit.

Within days of reaching home, Krish was hospitalised.

Doctors said something had been triggered — a stress response buried so deep it was now affecting his brain. His body had weakened. He was advised complete rest for three months—no emotional triggers. No confrontation. Only recovery.

No one from the group called.

No one texted.

No one asked how he was.

It hurt — but he didn't react.

He didn't cry.

He didn't complain.

He absorbed it quietly, the way he had learned to absorb everything else.

The doctors warned his parents clearly.

If the panic attacks continued, there was a risk of loss of bodily control—even paralysis.

That word stayed in the room long after the doctor left.

His parents were terrified.

They gave Krish everything he asked for — food, silence, comfort, attention. They tried to keep him smiling. But something inside him had shifted. He had begun fearing love itself. Even their care made him uneasy. His insecurities grew quietly, like shadows expanding in soft light.

He forwarded all his Delhi calls to Suhas.

Watching Krish like this disturbed him deeply. He had never seen Krish so fragile — so physically broken. Out of anger, fear, and helplessness, he called Priya.

He shouted.

He accused.

He demanded answers.

He told her Krish had been hospitalised — that if he hadn't come home in time, the damage could have been permanent.

“This is not friendship,” he said.

“This is torture. And my friend mistook torture for love.”

Priya responded with a single sentence.

“He tried to kiss me.”

Suhas didn't believe it.

“Even if he did,” he said, “there would have been a reason. He would never do something like that without context.”

The argument escalated. Priya started crying. She cut the call and immediately called Rishi, telling him she had been shouted at.

Rishi called back instantly.

Another fight followed.

Suhas repeated the exact words — about responsibility, about damage, about what this had done to Krish. Rishi responded coldly. He called Krish toxic—a bad person.

Suhas listened patiently.

Then he said one final thing.

“If anything happens to Krish,” he warned, “you'll see a side of me you won't be able to imagine.”

“Show me,” Rishi replied.

The call ended.

After that, Krish made changes.

He locked the entire group on WhatsApp.
Muted everyone on Instagram.
Stopped watching stories.
Stopped checking profiles.

He grew his hair.
Restarted routines.
Forced himself to smile.
Built a life that didn't require anyone's presence.

Then Rishi messaged him.

“You owe me money. Send it.”

There had been a shared financial arrangement. Krish had missed a payment while hospitalised.

For a moment, Krish thought this might be an excuse — a reason to talk.

So he didn't reply.

Calls followed.
Messages followed.

He ignored them all.

Then Aryan started calling.

He ignored that too.

Priya contacted Suhas and said the money had to be paid.

“He won't,” Suhas replied calmly. “Do what you want.”

Eventually, Krish answered Aryan's call.

Aryan shouted.

Used harsh words.

Accused Krish of things that didn't resemble the truth.

When Aryan demanded the money, something snapped.

"I won't give it," Krish said — and cut the call.

He immediately called Suhas and learned what had happened while the calls were being forwarded.

Anger flooded him.

Krish called Priya.

A massive argument followed.

He asked her exactly what she had told Rishi and the others. She repeated the same thing — that he had tried to kiss her.

"Why didn't you tell them about the three weeks?" he asked.

She handed the phone to her brother.

Her brother threatened him openly — said he could reach Krish's house in thirty minutes.

"Talk to your sister first," Krish replied calmly. "Know the full truth."

"She told me everything," the brother said.

"Did she tell you about the three weeks?" Krish asked.

Silence.

"She doesn't do those kinds of things," the brother replied.

"Then talk to her," Krish said. "Then talk to me."

"If she denies it," the brother threatened, "I'll come and finish you."

"All the best," Krish replied — and cut the call.
Then Krish called Rishi.

"You heard one side and chose it," he said. "Without hearing me."

"I didn't want to hear your side," Rishi replied.

"I lost trust in you the day you jumped from the road."

"You talk about trust without listening to me?" Krish asked.

Rishi changed the subject.

"You told Aryan you won't give my money."

"I said that only to make you call me," Krish replied.

"I never planned to keep it."

Then Krish said the truth.

"I became like this because of all of you. I was hospitalised. You didn't even ask if I was alive."

"I don't care about you," Rishi replied.

"I just want my money."

"I'll pay you," Krish said — and cut the call.

That day, Krish understood something clearly.

A single person can change an entire life.
Love can rebuild — and love can destroy.

From that point on, he removed everything toxic from his world.

He focused on healing.
Watched new stories.
Found comfort in anime.
Studied.
Stayed quiet.

And without announcement, without closure, without apology —

He disappeared.

Not to punish anyone.
Not to prove anything.

But because his body had finally learned
what his heart had refused to accept.

CHAPTER 23 — Leaving Without Losing

Krish slowly learned how to be alone.

He stayed home for several more months. Healing didn't arrive suddenly. It came in fragments—some days lighter, some days heavy enough to sit with for hours. His hair grew longer during that time, untamed, not yet long enough to tie, but long enough to measure how much time had passed.

Three months later, he convinced his parents he was ready to return to Delhi.

When he came back, he was different.

Not fearless.
Not fully healed.
But independent.

Emotionally stronger. Alone in a way that no longer frightened him.

Delhi welcomed him the same way it always had—loud, restless,

indifferent. The city hadn't changed. But the memories were still everywhere. Inside his flat. Outside it. Around the building. In the lanes, he once walked without thinking.

It felt as if they followed him—uninvited, persistent.

Still, he stood firm.

He built new routines. Woke early. Cooked for himself. Ate slowly. Studied. Learned new things. Slept on time. For the first time in years, his days had structure instead of survival.

He corrected an old mistake he hadn't realised was one—he began spending time with his college friends, visiting their homes, and sitting quietly. One friend's mother cooked South Indian food especially for him, without knowing how deeply it touched him.

Krish didn't say much.

He just ate. Grateful in a way words couldn't hold.

He started roaming Delhi alone.

Whenever the weight returned, he chose a new place. Kartavya Path became familiar—sometimes early morning, sometimes at dusk. Sometimes he sat alone in the ISKCON Temple. Sometimes he tried food alone. Shopped alone. Decathlon became a routine.

Slowly, something unexpected happened.

He began to love being alone.

He realised happiness didn't always need witnesses. Peace arrived when he stopped lying to himself. For the first time, he took a solo trip—completely alone.

And he enjoyed it.

His school friends visited Delhi. He showed them the city with quiet pride. Stayed connected afterwards and called them when loneliness crept in. They spoke about childhood, about life now, about nothing and everything.

He stopped visiting the roadside place where he once sat and cried.

Until one day, a message arrived.

Spoorthy.

She said she had heard about his health issues. She asked—carefully—if she could attend his flatmate's birthday celebration, only if he were comfortable. During his recovery, Spoorthy and his flatmate had grown close.

At first, it didn't affect him.

Then she began coming every day.

At first, it felt manageable. Then it didn't.

Seeing her reopened places he thought were sealed. Memories returned—not because he wanted them to, but because they had never truly left.

And Krish understood something honestly, without denial:

He hadn't forgotten anything.
He had only stayed away from it.

This time, he chose himself.

He didn't explain how her presence affected him. Didn't ask anyone to adjust. He made a decision—quiet, firm, final.

He would leave Delhi.

Permanently.

The thought didn't feel like running away. It felt like choosing peace.

He booked his train ticket for two weeks later.

During those weeks, Krish met his friends one by one. Visited favourite cafés. Returned to places that once held meaning. He laughed. Promised to visit again.

And he meant it—without urgency, without attachment.

In the final week, he told his flatmates the truth. That he was leaving Delhi permanently, for his mental health, for his peace, they went out for dinner together. That night, Krish wrote letters to everyone in the flat, thanking them for their care and presence. He gave one roommate the group photo he once kept on his shelf.

Before leaving, Krish did one last thing.

He wrote letters—not just to his flatmates, but to everyone from the gang. Every person who once mattered. Every person who once hurt him. Every conversation ended unfinished—every explanation he was never allowed to give.

He didn't write them with anger.

He didn't write them with hope.

He wrote them to empty himself.

When he finished, he sealed each letter carefully—then sealed them again. And again. Five layers of tape on every envelope—thick enough that opening them would destroy the paper itself.

The City That Let Me Go

He did it intentionally.

Because he knew he would never reread them.

Never give them to anyone.

Never meet those people again.

The letters weren't meant to be read.

They were meant to release him.

Everything he wanted to say now existed outside his body. He wasn't holding explanations anymore. Or guilt. Or unfinished words.

For the first time, Krish felt empty in a way that didn't hurt.

Zero expectations.

Zero guilt.

No fear.

Not numbness.

Freedom.

The night before leaving, Krish walked through Delhi one last time.

Rishi's old flat.

Rishi's new flat.

Every park.

The service road where he once jumped.

The places where he cried.

He took photos—not to stay attached, but so one day he could remember without pain.

Then the day came.

His roommates and friends stood at the station. He hugged them tightly. Cried openly. Took photos. When the final signal came, he hugged them again—longer this time—and boarded the train.

For thirty minutes, he stood near the door.

He had come to Delhi alone.
He was leaving Delhi alone.

But not empty.
Delhi hadn't changed at all.

What had changed was him.

His thoughts.
His boundaries.
The lessons he learned.
The mistakes he made.
The people he loved.
The people he let go.

Everything had ended—and everything had become memory, left behind where it was created.

That day, Krish cried like a child.

Not from weakness.

From release.

He cried until pain loosened its grip. Until suffering found shape and left through tears.

He had learned everything.

The City That Let Me Go

And lost everything.

At the cost of friendship.

And finally, he understood:

No one comes to Delhi and leaves empty-handed.

Some leave with memories.

Some with dreams.

Some with love.

Some with a changed life.

And Krish realised—

His life hadn't ended.

It had just begun.

CHAPTER 24 — When the City Stayed

A year later, Krish returned to Delhi.

Not to live.

Only to visit.

The city hadn't changed.

That was the first thing he noticed.

It hadn't softened or slowed. It hadn't erased anything. It remained loud, impatient, and fully alive. What it had done instead was quieter. It had altered him.

He felt steadier walking its streets. More grounded. Rooted in a way he hadn't recognised before.

Delhi no longer felt like a wound.

It felt familiar.

He stayed at his old flatmates 'place. Freshened up. Sat with them for hours, talking without urgency. Time passed easily, filling spaces that

had once felt unbearable. Laughter came naturally. Silence carried no weight.

That was when he learned that the rest of the group had left Delhi.

The news arrived plainly.

Without drama.

Without pain.

He didn't feel loss or resentment. What he felt was subtler — a sense that they were still present. In parks. In cafés. In streets they once occupied.

The city remembered them.

The next day, Krish went to his favourite café near their old area.

He ordered two coffees.

Not out of habit.

Not out of memory.

Simply because he wanted to.

He drank one slowly. Calmly. The second remained untouched. There was no waiting attached to it. No expectation.

He left it there and walked out.

This time, nothing followed him.

He revisited places that had once held him together — and broken him apart. Parks. Roads. Cafés. Even the places where he had collapsed

before.

There was no fear.

No panic.

Only stillness.

For the first time, something became clear to him.

He had never seen them as only friends.

He had loved them — openly, fully, without restraint.

That love had not disappeared when they did.

It remained.

In walls.

In trees.

In soil.

In spaces where laughter once existed.

It would remain long after he left again, long after time moved forward, until even the city forgot.

He still thought about Priya.

He still thought about Rishi.

He knew he would never see them again.

Yet he spoke to them daily — not through calls or messages, but

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through memory. Without guilt. Without longing. Without expectation.

They existed now without possession.

Krish exists here.

In these pages.

Not as a hero.

Not as a victim.

Not as right or wrong.

Only as someone who loved deeply, trusted openly, broke completely,
and chose to live.

This story is not about betrayal.

Not about survival.

Not about blame.

It is about love, care, misunderstanding, fear, pain, trust, guilt — and
everything human that exists between them.

And Krish understands something simple now.

His life did not end in Delhi.

It began

Closing Reflection

Some stories end loudly.
This one does not.

It ends the way healing often does—
without answers, without applause, without certainty.

Only with space.

For a long time, the person at the centre of this story believed closure
came from being understood.

From being chosen.

From someone finally saying the right thing.

It did not.

Closure arrived when the past stopped being asked to explain itself.

Not everyone in this story was cruel.

Not everyone was kind.

Most were simply human—unfinished, afraid, carrying their own
weight while unknowingly adding to someone else's.

This story is not written to demand forgiveness.

It is not written to accuse.

It exists because silence, left unexamined, can be heavier than truth.

If you recognised yourself in these pages
in the attachment, the confusion, the longing, the mistakes
then know this:

Feeling deeply is not weakness.

Trusting is not failure.

And needing distance is not abandonment.

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Love does not always remain gentle.
Friendship does not always endure.
And sometimes the bravest act is leaving
without hatred, without victory, without explanation.

What was lost here was not everything.
What was learned was the cost of loving without boundaries.
The truth that peace is not something others grant it is something
chosen, repeatedly, often alone.

This book does not ask the reader to take sides.
It does not ask for judgement.

It only asks for recognition:
that behind every story is a person trying to understand what broke
them.

If this book closes with quiet,
then it has ended where it needed to.

And if something lingers—a pause, a softened edge, a moment of
reflection that is enough.

Some cities hold.
Some teach.
And some let go.

Author's Reflection

This novel was written close to the events it portrays.

Not from clarity, and not from resolution—but from proximity. The narrative emerged while consequences were still unfolding, while emotional tension had not yet settled into understanding. Some sections were written when the characters were still inside their conflicts; others when the aftermath had only just begun to take shape. None of it was written with the safety of distance.

This is not a story shaped by hindsight.

It is a story shaped by attention.

Every character in these pages is written as human—limited, uncertain, capable of care and error in equal measure. No one enters the story fully formed, and no one leaves without having misunderstood something essential. The mistakes remain. The silences remain. Their weight is not softened.

The intention of this book is not to accuse, defend, or resolve. It exists because certain emotional experiences, when left unexamined, do not disappear—they persist. The act of observing them closely becomes a way of containing what might otherwise remain destructive.

If this story feels heavy at times, it is because the characters are not spared from the consequences of their choices. Nothing is rushed toward comfort. Nothing is rewritten for relief.

And if a reader recognises something familiar within these pages, the recognition is offered without instruction or judgment.

There are moments when choosing oneself is not cruelty.

Moments when leaving is not rejection.

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Moments when survival requires quiet separation rather than explanation.

This reflection does not close the story.

It simply acknowledges what was seen.

A Note on Perspective

This story is shaped by proximity rather than distance.

It was written close to the experiences it describes—before time could soften their edges or hindsight impose neat conclusions. Some chapters emerged while the emotional weight was still present. Others took form during early recovery. None were written with the comfort of full understanding.

Because of this, the narrative does not claim authority over truth. It does not attempt to judge intentions, assign blame, or offer definitive explanations. What it presents instead is an inner landscape as it was experienced—how affection deepens, how attachment blurs boundaries, how silence gathers meaning, and how leaving can become an act of survival.

Every character in this book is human.

Every choice is imperfect.

Every silence carries weight.

This story exists because certain experiences resist being held quietly. When left unexamined, they do not disappear—they distort. Writing became a way to give shape to those moments, not to resolve them.

If parts of this book feel heavy, it is because they were lived that way. If they feel unfinished, that too is intentional. Understanding rarely arrives all at once, and growth does not move in straight lines.

This is not a story about heroes or villains.

It is a story about learning—slowly—when care becomes burden, when staying becomes harm, and when choosing oneself is not abandonment.

Thank You

To my readers,

If you are reading this page, it means you stayed with this book until the end and for that, I am deeply grateful.

This story carries a part of me. Not just in its events, but in its silences, pauses, and unanswered questions. If you chose to sit with it, reflect on it, or even struggle with it, that choice means more to me than I can fully express.

Every reader meets a story differently. Some may see themselves in these pages. Some may disagree with it. Some may feel close to it, and others may not connect at all. All of that is valid. What matters is that you gave this story your time.

Thank you to those who shared this book with friends or family.
Thank you to those who spoke about it, questioned it, or reflected on it.
Thank you to those who offered kind words and even to those who challenged it.

This is my first novel. It was written without certainty, without guarantees, and without knowing how it would be received. Your presence here tells me that the story found its way to someone and that is enough.

If this book made you pause, feel quietly understood, or think about your own journeys of love, friendship, or letting go, then it has done what it was meant to do.

Thank you for reading.
Thank you for staying.
— **NR. Nitish**

A Note to Readers

If this story stayed with you and you'd like to share how it felt, I would truly appreciate hearing from you.

You can share your thoughts, reflections, or even disagreements whether as a review, a message, or a quiet note. As a first-time author, your responses matter deeply to me, and I read every one of them with care.

You may also choose to leave a review on the platform or bookstore where you purchased this book. Those words help the story find its way to other readers.

If you would like to share your thoughts, you can reach me at:

Instagram: @nitishneela

Email: neelanitish03@gmail.com

And if this story stayed with you and you feel like talking about it, you're always welcome to reach out.

Thank you again for reading.

About the Author

NR. Nitish is a young writer and UPSC aspirant based in India. He began writing in his early twenties, not with the intention of becoming an author, but as a way to understand emotional experiences that could not remain unexamined.

He is a graduate from **University of Delhi**, where he completed B.A. Programme, and is currently preparing for the Civil Services Examination. **The City That Let Me Go** is his first novel.

Nitish does not write from authority or accomplishment, but from attentiveness to relationships, to emotional shifts, and to the quiet moments where people often change without noticing. His work reflects an interest in friendship, attachment, loss, and the inner landscapes of young adulthood in urban India.

This book marks the beginning of his literary journey.